OCTOBER 2012
choice.com.au

96 PRODUCTS REVIEWED!

choice

THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

TESTS

- ...not vacs
- ...me theatre systems
- ...shing machines
- ...r conditioners
- ...od processors
- ...cuums
- ...ndline phones
- ...L & LED bulbs
- ...ck vacs
- ...tteries
- ...s

DETOX IN A BOX
Purging toxins or just your wallet?

MORE WEAR LESS TEAR
How to make your clothes last longer

A spoonful of sugar?

We find the cereal offenders

A whirl of activity

New CEO Alan Kirkland dives headfirst into the busy world of CHOICE, exploring our stories, campaigns and labs

It has been a real thrill to settle into CHOICE over the past month, and to get to know the talented people who make up the team here.

I have always had a high opinion of CHOICE – from seeing the organisation in the media over many years and working alongside CHOICE on consumer advocacy campaigns, as well as from relying on CHOICE for all of my major household purchases.

It has been an eye-opener to be able to see the powerhouse that sits behind all that activity. On day two in the job, I spent a few hours enjoying a tour of the test laboratories. If you have not taken up the opportunity to join one of these tours, I encourage you to do so (you can find details on page 10). You'll be amazed by the rigour of the testing regime, and the creativity that is involved in working out how to put some products through their paces!

While testing is at the core of our advice to consumers, it is just one aspect of what we do. We've got some of the best investigative consumer journalists in the country working for us, backed up by a crack campaigns and media team that help to get our work out into the community.

This ability to connect expert analysis with a community of concerned consumers was one of the things that most attracted me to the role of CEO here. What distinguishes CHOICE from other sources of consumer information is that it is owned by its members. We depend on you to lend weight to our campaigns, alert us to the latest scams and fund our testing and investigative work. I look forward to getting to know as many of you as possible, so if you have any suggestions about how we can improve the ways in which we involve our members, please send me an email at **alan@choice.com.au**.

This month we've got lots of the kind of useful information I've come to love as a CHOICE member. We've analysed 195 breakfast cereals and found that despite some improvements, many are too high in sugar, high in salt and low in fibre – especially those aimed at our kids (page 16).

And on page 36 we find out whether the deals those pushy door-to-door energy provider salespeople are peddling are really all that different.

Happy reading!

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For general membership and consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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04 Checkout
News, views and product sneak peeks

14 Your Say

16 Breakfast cereals
Why some are still a nutritional minefield

21 What makes us fat?
Separating facts from theories

24 Detox products
Do they clean your insides or just your wallet?

28 Sunglasses
They may look the same, but beware...

30 Geo-blocking
Aussie consumers are being lost in the global marketplace

32 Repair or replace?
The best ways to look after your precious things

36 Electricity marketing
A waste of energy?

41 Lay-by
It's making a comeback, but watch out for the traps

44 Ask the Experts
Our experts answer your tricky or techie questions

75 Index

76 Hard Word

ON TEST

46 Vacuuming special
Barrels, robots and sticks take the floor

52 Home theatre systems
Music to your ears? Hardly

55 TVs
A smaller screen doesn't have to mean small performance

58 Air conditioners
The right-sized reverse cycle model for your space

60 Food processors
We whisk, chop, slice and mix our way through 16 models

64 Energy-efficient lamps
Have LEDs put CFLs out of business yet?

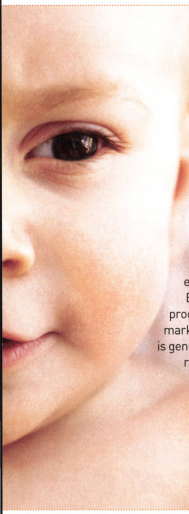
65 Landline phones
Rumours of their death have been greatly exaggerated

68 Rechargeable batteries
The greener, more cost-effective way to power up

70 Washing machines
Which washer's water wastage made us weep?

Don't let your treasured items fade from glory before their time – see our maintenance tips on page 32

CHOICE's Zoya Sheftalovich is a caring individual



Amber alert

The list of concerns around the effectiveness and safety of amber teething necklaces is growing.

The necklaces, which proponents claim relieve the pain of teething, aren't made for chewing but supposedly work by warming up on the baby's skin and, as a result, releasing natural oils that are absorbed and work their "magical curative powers". Distributors claim the amber can "stimulate the thyroid glands to reduce drooling", "boost the immune system", "accelerate wound healing" and be "an extremely effective natural analgesic".

But it's not even clear how this oil release process could work. According to amber marketers, one way to establish whether amber is genuine is to rub it until it heats up enough to release the scent of pine-tree resins. Proponents of this so-called rubbing test warn that "this needs a very strong hand, as it is rather difficult to heat amber [especially when polished] to the necessary temperature". But CHOICE is not convinced the friction of resting on baby's skin equates to rubbing with "a very strong hand".

Earlier this year, the ACCC lodged a series of complaints with the TGA about the necklaces. Their concern was that the distributors' claims were therapeutic in nature, yet the products weren't listed or registered with the TGA as therapeutic goods.

The TGA's advertising Complaints Resolution Panel (CRP) upheld this technical breach of the Therapeutic Goods Act in all cases, but also took the opportunity to ask the advertisers for evidence for the claims they make. Most ignored the request and didn't respond. However, one company "conceded the absence of scientific basis for therapeutic claims", saying "we only have anecdotal, experience-based evidence" and that the product had been "supplied in response to consumer demand".

A similar complaint to the CRP about amber necklaces (not from the ACCC) led the panel to conclude that claims indicating "any therapeutic effect had not been verified, were misleading, and were likely to arouse unwarranted expectations", and that the representations "abused the trust or exploited the lack of knowledge of consumers".

KARINA BRAY

BREAKING NEWS

People power

We've launched our Take the Power Back campaign in response to soaring household electricity bills that are being driven by the multi-billion dollar price tag for energy infrastructure. By signing up at **choice.com.au/takethepowerback** you can demand our energy ministers fix the single biggest driver of our rising electricity bills. To find out more about the problems with energy marketing, turn to our story on page 36.

Pass the post

New Zealand Post has launched YouShop, a mail forwarding service that allows NZ residents to shop online at US retailers that require a residential US delivery address. But as with some similar services available here, while YouShop forwards mail to consumers, it doesn't allow shoppers to circumvent retailers' requirements that payment be made using a US credit card. Turn to page 30 to find out more about geo-blocking.

Knocked back

The Do Not Knock register has been put on hold. Last month, a House of Representatives committee put the kibosh on a bill calling for a scheme that would let consumers opt out of unsolicited marketing calls to homes, citing concerns about "its capacity to address its policy intent".

Oil tablets fishy

Fish oil tablets have failed to help prevent cardiovascular events in a study of 12,500 patients with diabetes or pre-diabetes with heart disease or at high risk for having a heart attack or stroke.

The patients took either a one-gram fish oil capsule per day or a placebo capsule that contained no omega-3. The fish oil group experienced a reduction in blood triglycerides, which are linked to heart disease, over six years of follow-up. But the rate of heart attacks, strokes, and deaths from arrhythmias and other heart-related causes was the same for both groups.

This study replicates the findings of a large meta-analysis of studies earlier this year looking at people with an increased risk of heart disease, where omega-3 tablets had no effect on reducing cardiovascular events. Researchers from both studies concluded that supplements may not help, but eating fish instead of less healthy sources of protein such as red meat may be protective. **KARINA BRAY**

Every 3 hours

an Australian has a lower limb amputated as a direct result of diabetes

3400

Lower limb amputations 2004-5 as a direct result of diabetes

SOURCE: AIHW

Australia stuck at a red light

Three more UK supermarket chains have announced they are adopting traffic light nutrition labelling for food products. Tesco, Aldi and Lidl followed the lead of other UK supermarkets, which leaves just one chain, Morrisons, without traffic light labelling.

CHOICE is currently involved with public health and industry groups in a front-of-pack labelling design process instigated in December 2011 by Australian food and health ministers. The ministers committed to an interpretive labelling system, which means complex, numerical information is translated into colours, words or symbols that can be easily understood at a glance. However, ministers have expressed doubts over traffic light labelling, which has been opposed by much of the food industry.

ANGELA McDOUGALL

Shark net

Several scams are making the rounds in Australia, so consumers are being warned to remain vigilant.

Scammers are running free "investment seminars" promising a 250% return in exchange for investors buying property in the foreclosure-riddled US property market. The houses may seem cheap – often costing less than $100,000 – but experts warn some may be located in terrible neighbourhoods or are abandoned.

"Aussies have bought houses in the US for $50,000 and can't re-sell them for $25,000," warns real estate crusader Neil Jenman.

If you're interested in an overseas property investment it's essential to get independent advice, otherwise the promised returns may never eventuate.

Meanwhile, NSW Fair Trading is warning consumers to look out for scam artists masquerading as government officials.

"Victims are losing money because scammers are sophisticated and convincing," says commissioner Rod Stowe. "They trade on people's trust and regularly impersonate government officers, including Fair Trading and ATO employees."

Fair Trading received 1000 scam reports in the first eight months of 2012, ranging from roving home-maintenance con artists to unsolicited offers of bank refunds and dazzling wealth-creation schemes.

The ATO has delivered even worse news, saying it's received more than 10,000 scam reports through August, including a new trend in which fake job advertisements are used to obtain personal information. The bogus ads are posted on recruitment websites. Those who take the bait are asked to provide their tax file numbers, and sometimes their bank account details as a part of the application process.

You can report scams to scamwatch.gov.au.

UTA MIHM & ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Banking on home loans

The big banks are earning about $75,000 on an average home loan of $293,000 over 25 years, according to The Australia Institute (TAI). Banks earned less than half that 12 years ago, when the average mortgage was $132,000. The figures raise questions about banks' claims that higher funding costs are creating pressure on their profit margins.

The Australian Bankers' Association (ABA) said banks' costs such as staff and interest paid to depositors must be taken into account. But TAI senior research fellow David Richardson defended the figures, arguing "if anything our figures are underestimating because... no allowance is made for the fees and charges on home loans."

UTA MIHM

Egg crackdown

A South Australian egg retailer will shell out $50,000 as a penalty for substituting caged eggs for free-range ones. Rosemary Bruhn, who operated Rosie's Free Range Eggs, allegedly supplied tens of thousands of caged eggs to dozens of business customers.

The eggs were supplied in cartons that stated "Rosie's Direct from the chook to you", "Free Range Eggs" and "produced and packed at Rosie's Free Range Eggs", and featured an image of Bruhn outdoors surrounded by chickens.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

FIRST LOOK

Easily identified flying object

If you're concerned a remote control flying device with an in-built high definition camera might be used by some for anti-social activities, rest assured that the AR.Drone 2.0 is unlikely to be useful as a stealthy spy camera. That said, it is fun.

The device is controlled via an app on your Apple or Android smartphone or tablet and a wireless connection. The controls are pretty simple to use and you can see where the drone is going because the images from its cameras are visible on your control device. There are two cameras: one is high definition and forward-facing, while the other points down and is at a much lower resolution.

Connections to Facebook and YouTube make it simple to record and share your flights on the AR. Drone website. In addition, there are games and activities that help transport the pilot to virtual worlds, where there's the opportunity for more competition and social interaction.

The AR.Drone 2.0 is reasonably stable in still air but will wander about a bit in a breeze. There's a warning to pay careful attention when flying at high altitude because wind speeds will vary. In our tests a full battery lasted about 10-and-a-half minutes.

Picture quality from the front-facing HD camera isn't as good as that of a relatively cheap compact camera, but is sufficient for seeing where you're going and sharing with other Drone fans. You can record to a USB stick as well as directly to your control device.

It's not particularly noisy, but it will draw attention to itself in built-up areas. It comes with a soft protective hull for flying it indoors, as well as an outdoors hull that leaves the plastic rotors uncovered. Take care when flying in this mode because the rotors could do serious damage to your eyes.

CHOICE verdict

The AR.Drone 2.0 is fun to fly and a good deal less smelly and noisy than model aeroplanes of the past. The sharing factor is important and adds a new dimension, but battery life is a limitation – and at $49.95 each these will add substantially to the cost.

CHRIS RUGGLES

PARROT AR.DRONE 2.0
PRICE $349 (extra batteries are $49.95 each)
CONTACT ardrone2.com
★★★½☆

Giving good counsel

Financial counsellors are celebrating an important win, with new protections to come into effect in March next year restricting the use of the terms "financial counsellor" and "financial counselling" to not-for-profit organisations that actually provide those services.

Financial counsellors provide free, confidential and independent assistance to consumers. However, for-profit organisations have also been using the term "financial counsel", and can steer consumers towards expensive and unnecessary services.

"It has been a source of great frustration to us that, up until now, use of the term 'financial counselling' has been open to anyone," says Fiona Guthrie, executive director of Financial Counselling Australia.

Under the restrictions, in order to give "financial counselling" an agency must offer free services, provide only sanctioned credit options, be eligible for membership of a financial-counselling association and ensure staff have adequate skills and training. **ELIZABETH McNESS & MADISON CARTWRIGHT**

WHOOPS

Our superannuation story in *CHOICE*, September 2012 (page 5), referred to the 2012-13 financial year rather than 2011-12.

On page 55 in the same issue we said the three What to Buy ovens have no surface temperature label on the door. In fact, they operate below a temperature that requires a sticker.

IMAGE: PARROTT

I SAY

Hopeless Optus

Recently our Optus internet stopped working unexpectedly. I checked it out at my end, and all seemed fine. I thought perhaps Optus was having technical difficulties that would resolve themselves, but after several days of no internet, I called to get answers.

When troubleshooting failed to get to the bottom of the problem two hours later, the customer service operator suggested I book a service technician to come out to the house, at my expense, to look into the problem.

I couldn't believe he expected me to pay for technical help, when he couldn't give me any clear idea of the likely source of the problem. I protested, and in the end he said it was probably a modem issue, even though all the modem's lights were on. He ordered a new one, but I was staring down the barrel of two weeks without internet.

> No-one at Optus could explain why it doesn't provide warnings or notifications when an internet account is suspended

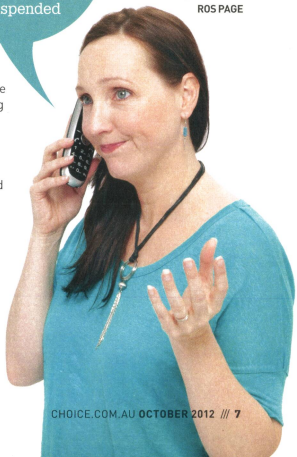
The next day I tried to access my Optus webmail from work and home and found it wouldn't connect. I rang again. After some time, the techie discovered our email and internet account had been suspended as a result of "suspected spam" on the account. My husband had just joined Facebook, so he'd got numerous email notifications that same day about his account activity. This was the suspected spam Optus had suspended our accounts for, and the cause of our internet blackout!

No-one at Optus could explain why it doesn't provide warnings or notifications when an internet account is suspended. Optus can contact us via text, home phone and even post when it comes to marketing, but can't notify us about something as important as this. And no-one could explain why a technician couldn't see the status of our service that was suspended.

To add insult to injury, despite the fact that I cancelled the modem and was offered a credit for our days without internet access, our next bill arrived with an unidentified charge and no credit. I rang again and found I'd been charged for the modem. This was removed and the credit eventually applied, but I couldn't even get a copy of my new bill because bills are "system generated".

This isn't my first bad experience with Optus, and I'll be looking for another service provider in future. It's just one more reason why the new telco code that mandates better customer service is sorely needed.

ROS PAGE



Cyber privacy scrapped

Internet service providers can now be forced to record your details when asked to do so by the Australian Federal Police, or certain other law enforcement agencies, under a new bill passed by the Senate in August.

The Cybercrime Legislation Amendment Bill highlights the growing tension between consumers' rights to privacy and the challenges facing law enforcement in the digital environment.

Greens communications spokesperson Scott Ludlam has slammed the bill, saying it was "provocative, pre-emptive and typifies everything that is wrong with the way the balance is tilting against the rights of the individual.

"We need to ensure that privacy protections remain in place."

But Attorney-General Nicola Roxon defended the bill, saying it was "good news for fighting crime and will help make it easier for police to track down cyber criminals around the world.

"In particular, this will help combat criminal offences relating to forgery, fraud, child pornography, and infringement of copyright and intellectual property."

CHOICE is currently looking into the impacts of the bill on consumers.

MADISON CARTWRIGHT

Room to improve

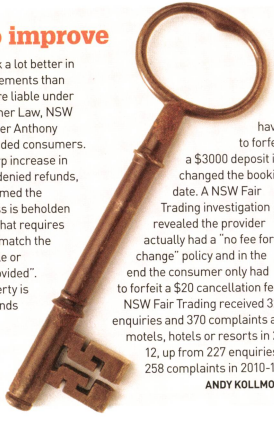
Hotels that look a lot better in their advertisements than they do in reality are liable under Australian Consumer Law, NSW Fair Trading Minister Anthony Roberts has reminded consumers.

Following a sharp increase in complaints about denied refunds, Fair Trading confirmed the hospitality business is beholden to an ACL regime that requires goods on offer to "match the description, sample or demonstration provided".

Even if the property is up to scratch, refunds must be fairly returned. In one case study, a consumer was told he would have to forfeit a $3000 deposit if he changed the booking date. A NSW Fair Trading investigation revealed the provider actually had a "no fee for change" policy and in the end the consumer only had to forfeit a $20 cancellation fee.

NSW Fair Trading received 327 enquiries and 370 complaints about motels, hotels or resorts in 2011-12, up from 227 enquiries and 258 complaints in 2010-11.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



A bleak future

280,000
Australians living with dementia in August 2012
1m+
Australians are expected to suffer from dementia in 2050
$80bn
Expected spending required in 2062/63 to deal with the dementia epidemic

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGEING

Small write-offs

Repairing a small car after a minor accident could cost up to 70% of the price of the car, according to an NRMA study. And high repair costs can mean higher car insurance premiums compared with cars that cost less to repair.

The NRMA tested the damage caused on the bumpers of the nine top-selling small cars in Australia after a 10km/h crash. The Toyota Yaris YRS and the Honda Jazz VTi were the worst performers: with repairs costing about 70% of the price of a new car, both cars would normally be written off after such an accident.

"Poorly designed bumpers can slide under other bumpers on impact, causing more damage to both vehicles in a collision," explains NRMA Insurance head of research Robert McDonald.

The Holden Barina was the best performer, with the repairs costing about 14% of its price. Other cars tested were the Nissan Micra ST-L (36%), Ford Fiesta LX (42%), Suzuki Swift GL (49%), VW Polo 77TSI Comfortline (51%), Hyundai i20 Active (53%) and Mazda2 Maxx (59%). **UTA MIHM**

Don't extend yourself

NSW Fair Trading is warning consumers to be wary of purchasing extended warranties on products and services after receiving nearly 300 extended warranty-related complaints in the 13 months to 1 August 2012.

As we highlighted in *CHOICE*, August 2012 (page 32), the Australian Consumer Law already gives people free protection, including replacement, refund and compensation for goods of unacceptable quality.

"People often underestimate their rights at law and may be convinced of the need to buy an extended warranty when they don't actually need one," says NSW Fair Trading Minister Anthony Roberts.

Sales staff may recommend purchasing an extended warranty without explaining what, if any, additional benefits are provided. Roberts warns that such pushy tactics may be illegal. "Retailers who mislead consumers [about extended warranties] could face stiff penalties," he says.

RACHEL CLEMONS

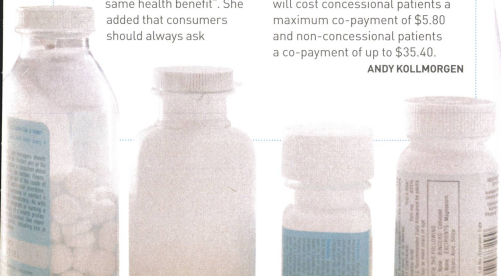
Medi mark-up

Federal Health Minister Tanya Plibersek has taken a swipe at pharmaceutical companies after they raised the brand premium on 85 medicines listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) earlier this year.

Consumers should "think twice about paying extra for the box and the brand name", she said, making the point that alternative brands on the PBS without the $7-plus mark-up provide "exactly same health benefit". She added that consumers should always ask pharmacists if there are cheaper options than the medicines doctors specify on scripts.

As part of the government's ongoing effort to roll back payments to pharma companies for medicines approved for PBS listing, pharmacists are financially incentivised to help patients choose less expensive brands. Plibersek said there is always a surcharge-free option for brand-name medicines on the PBS that will cost concessional patients a maximum co-payment of $5.80 and non-concessional patients a co-payment of up to $35.40.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Member spotlight

Introducing CHOICE Member Jessica Sichter, an animal lover who works in pet supplies and lives in Brisbane with her partner Naaman and her pet cats.

Why did you join CHOICE?

I grew up reading *CHOICE* magazine – my father was a subscriber. My passion for consumer rights and education grew and now there's no way I would make a purchase without investigating all the options first. An important part of that investigation process is consulting CHOICE.

What area/s of CHOICE Online do you view first and why?

When I receive the CHOICE newsletter in my inbox I hungrily click on the new tests that interest me. Sometimes it's because I'm interested in purchasing that product, other times I'm just curious as to which products came out on top. Sometimes I check to see whether a product I already own has received a high rating and when it has I congratulate myself on choosing well!

Have you made any CHOICE recommended purchases?

I first became a CHOICE member after I moved out of home and wanted to know which washing machine to buy (see page 70). I needed an energy efficient product that wasn't going to fail as I could not afford to fix it. I'm happy to say that the washing machine I purchased is still going strong after five years of worry-free washing.

Recently, we went on our first overseas holiday to Japan and South Korea and I used many CHOICE reviews and guides in planning our trip. The info on luggage, travel insurance, flight comparison websites, travel money cards and vaccinations proved most useful. I was chuffed that I managed to plan a hitch-free holiday myself without having to pay a travel agent.

Do you recommend products to family and friends?

Sometimes, but I'm more likely to recommend that they subscribe to CHOICE themselves. This is because I recognise that different products suit different people so it's best to read the buying guides and arm yourself with the knowledge to decide what's best for you.

Which CHOICE campaigns have you found to be most important to you?

The campaign to define free-range egg standards and to have those standards regulated. Knowing that something I'm eating has come from the suffering of an animal leaves a bad taste in my mouth. As a consumer who tries to buy cruelty-free eggs, I find it frustrating there's no adequate definition or policing of the term "free range".

What product/s would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?

As someone with a passion for pets I would like to see more pet products tested. Pets are part of Australian families – no longer relegated to the backyard, they mean so much to us now that they are sleeping in our beds! Many people (including myself) are choosing pets over children and a large portion of my income goes towards my pets' care. So I'd love to see buying guides for parasite treatments and cat litter as well as tests on pet foods and automatic feeders and waterers.

Tell us about your CHOICE experiences – become our next Member in the Spotlight! Send us an email at inthespotlight@choice.com.au.

And the winner is...

K Madden of Corrimal, NSW is the winner of our Expose a Shonky competition. She has won a kitchen appliance prize pack worth more than $1200.

Lab Tours

Curious about how CHOICE tests hundreds of product every year? Then join our lab tour in Marrickville, Sydney, to be held on Friday 19 October and Wednesday 14 November (the last tour for 2012). Go to choice.com.au/about-us/lab-tours or email us at labtours@choice.com.au to book.

Not all gloom for older mums

Despite the risks associated with women having children later in life, a new study has shown there are some developmental advantages.

The study looked at the relationship between mothers' age and their children's health and development. Using a large sample of children in the UK, the researchers found that rates of unintentional injuries and children being admitted to hospital declined with increasing maternal age. Kids born to older mothers were also more likely to be fully immunised by nine months, had a better grasp of language, and fewer social and emotional difficulties.

For more stories like this, call us on 1800 069 552 to subscribe to *CHOICE Health Reader*. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Drugs, new and approved

There were 795 medicines approved for use by Australia's drug regulator in the last decade and cancer and heart disease patients have benefited from the greatest number of approvals, according to a new report.

Medicines Milestones, commissioned by The Australian Medicines Industry, found cancer treatments accounted for 115 of total approvals, reflecting the significant burden of the disease in terms of illness, death and costs. The TGA also approved 82 medicines for cardiovascular disease, a leading cause of death in Australia.

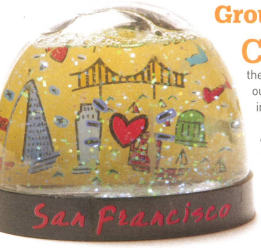
But of the 184 medicines approved for conditions in the federal government's National Health Priority focus areas, just three per cent focused on mental health. One in five Australians experiences a mental illness every year. **RACHEL CLEMONS**

Telcos taken to task

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) has issued a guidebook to explain new consumer rights enforceable through the updated Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code.

ACCAN's *Making the Right Call* also offers some practical tips on how to shop for a mobile phone plan, such as finding out the minimum amount you will have to pay over the length of the contract and whether you'll receive a warning if you exceed your download limit.

The guidebook also lays out the timeline for better consumer protections to come. From 27 October this year, telco advertising will face new hurdles, including having to specify the value of a two-minute national call, a text message, and one megabyte of data in ads where calls or data are included in the plan. Telcos won't be able to use the word "unlimited" unless this is literally true, and "cap" can only refer to a maximum limit on monthly payments. From March 2013, telcos will have to provide a critical information summary outlining details such as minimum and maximum charges. Check out accan.org.au/rightcall. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**



Grounding compensation

Consumer affairs ministers across the country are pushing to have the Travel Compensation Fund phased out and replaced with a voluntary and industry-led accreditation scheme.

The fund was established in 1986 to compensate consumers should their travel agent become insolvent. It ensures consumers who use travel agents aren't left out of pocket if the agent is unable to provide them with the services they have already paid for. It also acts as an industry regulator, and ensures travel agents are able to meet their obligations to consumers.

However, ministers now believe the fund is dated and no longer necessary. They argue the industry can do a better job of providing consumer protection. But we believe the fund serves an important function that can't be replicated by a voluntary accreditation scheme. Other consumer groups, such as the Queensland Consumers' Association, argue any voluntary scheme won't be able to compensate consumers and will only provide oversight. **MADISON CARTWRIGHT**

Good game?

A regular session with active video games using your Wii, Kinect or other games console probably won't provide a good workout or replace going to the gym, according to an analysis of 41 studies of these "exergames".

The reviewers found most of these games provide only light- to moderate-intensity physical activity, not nearly as good as real-life exercise. However, they can be good for elderly people or those who've been sedentary and could benefit from a gentle introduction to exercise. Dance Dance Revolution, GameBike and Wii boxing were found to be among the more taxing games, with more-experienced players tending to get a more vigorous workout than beginners. **KARINA BRAY**

Fatal attraction

Small magnetic toys, including BuckyBalls, Buckycubes, Nanodots, Neocubes, Neodymium sphere magnets and Xcubes, have been banned in Victoria, with similar bans in place in WA and NSW.

The magnets can cause serious injury if swallowed or inhaled. According to Consumer Affairs Victoria, toddlers and small children are at risk of placing the objects in their mouths, while teenagers or adults who have been using the magnets as facial jewellery may accidentally swallow them.

"The magnets can lock together through intestinal walls and cause perforations and blockages," says Victorian Minister for Consumer Affairs Michael O'Brien. "Urgent surgery may then be required to remove the magnets, to avoid serious medical complications or death."

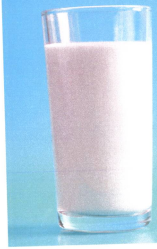
While a nationwide ban is being pursued, it won't result in immediate removal of the products, according to O'Brien. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Casualties of war

The supermarket milk wars are having a direct impact on the livelihoods of eastern dairy farmers, according to the national Dairy Farmers Milk Co-operative. The cooperative says the outcome of recent negotiations with milk processor Lion Dairy (a major supplier of milk to supermarkets along the eastern seaboard) means farmers' profit margins will be squeezed even tighter.

DFMC chairman Ian Zandstra says farm gate prices have been cut by seven per cent in northern NSW and Queensland and nine per cent in Victoria, resulting in farmers having to sell for about 14-15c per litre. To United Dairyfarmers of Victoria president Kerry Callow, it's proof the supermarkets' promises were hollow.

"Coles management told farmers at the Victorian Farmers Federation Annual Conference last year that Coles would absorb losses on its $1 milk," Callow says. "A little over a year later, we see their cut-throat pricing strategy trickle down to dairy farmers." ANDY KOLLMORGEN



IMAGES: NINTENDO/ISTOCKPHOTO

Clean machine

The hassle of cleaning up an electric juicer is one reason the manual citrus models still have a place in most kitchens. We decided to test Philips' claim that the QuickClean HR1871 is so easy to clean it can be done in less than a minute.

We put the juicer through our normal test program. It scores 83% overall, which is equal with the other top performers (Sunbeam JE4800 Juice Drop and Breville BJE520 Froojie Juice Fountain – see *CHOICE*, August 2011). It has an edge on some other juicers for cleaning because the filter is smooth enough to allow wiping with a sponge or cloth, and the whole assembly, including the pulp container, comes out in one unit, which makes transporting it to a sink easier.

However, there are some cracks and crevices that can trap particles of food and the stainless steel motor housing will need some care. All the removable parts are dishwasher-safe, but only on the top shelf.

The QuickClean has a large chute and gives excellent results for orange as well as combined pineapple and watermelon juice, and very good results with carrots and apples. It has a large juice jug graduated to 1250ml, but more juice will fit if you're willing to risk spilling some, and a large pulp container as well – making it convenient if you're juicing for a number of people.

Like many juicers in this category it's bulky, juice can drip from the spout after processing, the locking arm requires some strength to position and the blades are accessible.

PHILIPS HR1871 QUICKCLEAN CENTRIFUGAL JUICER
PRICE $249
CONTACT philips.com.au
★★★★★

CHOICE verdict

The QuickClean lives up to its main claim of being able to be cleaned in less than a minute, but so are many other juicers if you get them to the sink immediately after use. It's a very good performer overall and definitely one to consider if you're looking for lots of juice.

CHRIS RUGGLES

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Contact us!
Email us at yoursay@choice.com.au or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Off the block

My latest Telstra bill informed me that mobile call charges from 1 October 2012 will be charged in 60-second blocks, up from 30-second blocks. No justification for the change was offered, and the example they gave certainly does not reflect the impact on people like me who typically use the mobile for short calls away from the home landline.

Given call durations are already recorded to the second, I see no reason that charges should not be based on this information. The 60-second billing increments are just a way to charge for a service not provided.

Thumbs down, Telstra.

Graham Wort, Mandurah, WA

Sketchy after-sales service

I wasn't as fortunate in my experience with faulty runners as Chas Bullock (Your Say, *CHOICE*, August 2012). I bought a $200 pair of Skechers S2 Lites at a local shoe store. After about four months, the mesh and lining on the right shoe developed a hole, and a few weeks later the left shoe showed a similar fault, with both holes rapidly becoming larger. In addition, the sole on the right shoe wore down to reveal that the foam was covered by a thin layer of rubber (the only thing covering the foam along the sides of the shoe is a sprayed-on layer of pink material).

The retailer sent the shoes along with my letter of complaint regarding the short life of this very expensive product to the wholesaler, Accent Group Pty Ltd. Accent returned the shoes with this comment: "Skechers is considerate of the fact that you've had the footwear for a limited amount of time; however... a replacement or credit can only be issued if a genuine manufacturing fault is found."

Both the retailer and Accent were very defensive and offered no apology, expression of regret at my experience or recognition of the obvious fact that my concern lay with the poor quality of the shoes, not the manufacture.

Dr Lindsay Paul, Ivanhoe, Vic

CHOICE SAYS *If you bought the shoes after 1 January 2011, they're covered by consumer guarantees. By law, both the retailer and the manufacturer guarantee that goods are of acceptable quality (which includes their being durable) when they sell them to you. The test of "acceptable quality" takes into account the price paid for the goods – in this case $200, which is comparatively expensive for a pair of runners. At this price, you wouldn't expect them to develop holes in the mesh after only four months. Since you've already approached the retailer and wholesaler, we suggest getting in touch with Consumer Affairs Victoria (1300 55 81 81). You can find out more at consumer.vic.gov.au/shopping/refunds-and-returns/problems-with-a-product/faulty-product.*

Thumbs

I contacted Tefal regarding a replacement lid for a Jamie Oliver stew pot. Having been told by the retailer that one was not available, I thought I'd try the manufacturer. After a series of emails, I was told of an old demo model. This was fine with me, as a good scrub would restore it. However, I soon received another email to tell me a much better lid had come to light, and this was sent to me free of charge.

Ross Harman, Shepparton, Vic

CHOICE recently invested in a new set of Macquarie dictionaries, only to find one copy was misbound, with some pages out of sequence and others missing entirely. When it comes to dictionaries, lack of alphabetical order is a bit of a deal-breaker, so we put in a call to the publisher, Macmillan. Happily, a free replacement was mailed out to us, pronto.

I purchased an Adventure Ridge LED headlight from Aldi. On the packaging it said that batteries were included – but when I opened the package at home there were none. I contacted Aldi, and a package of batteries arrived in the post in a few days.

Judy Bourke, Thirroul, NSW

"I felt humiliated and judged. After all this, I missed my sister's service. I am still angry and upset beyond words"

Compassion grounded

LETTER OF THE MONTH

In July, I flew with Virgin Australia from Adelaide to Townsville via Sydney to attend my sister's funeral. She passed away very suddenly after being recently diagnosed with cancer and I didn't get to see her before she died.

The funeral started at 2pm, and the flight from Sydney was due to arrive in Townsville at 12.15pm. My flight arrived in Sydney an hour late because of fog. However, the flight attendant said I would probably make my connection as flights were backed up.

I hurried from that flight to the departure gate and my flight to Townsville, which was still on the tarmac. As I presented my boarding pass it was rejected by the Virgin ground staff member at the gate. She told everyone from the Adelaide leg of the flight that we could not board as they had thought we would be too late, and they'd bumped us back to the next flight, arriving at 4.45pm in Townsville. When we protested she yelled, "Let me speak!"

Meanwhile, the door of the Townsville plane closed. I said I had to make my sister's funeral. She said she wouldn't have time to change back the boarding pass. However, later it only took her a few seconds for her to put me on the next flight to Townsville. Furthermore, they must have known my flight had landed, because my other sister, who was taking the same flight from Sydney, had approached the desk before she got on and been told my flight had already landed.

The Virgin staff member at the desk showed me no empathy even though I was in tears. She booked me on a flight to Townsville via Brisbane – business class, perhaps as compensation, though there could be no compensation for missing my sister's funeral. The flight left Sydney for Brisbane about 35 minutes late. When I arrived, I hurried to the gate. The ground staff member looked at my boarding pass, then at me, and said, "You would not have paid business class – I'll have to change your seat!"

I felt humiliated and judged. After all this, I missed my sister's service. While I did attend a second service in Adelaide, held for the benefit of our elderly parents, I am still angry and upset beyond words.

Both my sister and I sent separate emails of complaint to Virgin immediately afterwards. But while my sister received an email of acknowledgement in August, I've still heard nothing.

Anne Woolford, Adelaide, SA

CHOICE SAYS *When CHOICE raised the issue with Virgin Australia, a spokesperson told us that the situation was regrettable and "should never have happened". She said it was not representative of the airline's service standards.*

Virgin Australia has extended Anne sincere apologies and offered her a refund as well as airline credit as a gesture of goodwill.

Cereal offenders

Many breakfast cereals aimed at kids still have too much sugar and not enough fibre, **Rachel Clemons** finds

Breakfast cereals are big business. Last year, Australians spent $1.17bn on ready-to-eat cereals, and munched our way through 169,470 tonnes of it – that's about 10 large (750g) boxes for every man, woman and child. But how do these products stack up nutritionally? CHOICE reviewed 195 cereals to find out.

The most important meal

Starting your day with breakfast provides many advantages. A number of studies suggest people who eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight or obese than those who skip it. Eating breakfast can also help children with concentration and performance at school.

People who eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight or obese than those who skip it

Our body's preferred source of fuel is carbohydrate, so a cereal – being grain-based and therefore naturally high in carbohydrates – is generally a good option to kickstart your day. And a cereal high in fibre is a real bonus. Adults need about 25-30g fibre a day, and most of us don't eat enough. And it's not just adults – a recent Australian study found only 18% of pre-schoolers are getting an adequate intake of fibre.

You should be able to rely on a breakfast cereal to deliver a decent whack of your daily fibre, so the products in the general cereals table (page 18) are ranked by dietary fibre. Only those with high (10-19.9%) or very high (20% or more) fibre are listed, as we believe this is a priority when choosing a healthy cereal. What you don't want in a breakfast cereal is lots of salt, sugar or fat (see our checklist opposite).

Kids lose again

Children don't need as much fibre as adults, but a cereal with a moderate amount of fibre is still better for them than one with little or none. Of the 41 cereals aimed at kids (see table, page 20), 17 have at least five per cent (moderate) fibre. But more than half are low in fibre – most of these providing less than a gram of fibre in a serve. Since nine to 13-year-olds need between 20 and 24g fibre a day, these cereals barely make a dent.

By contrast, it seems there's no shortage of sugar when it comes to kids' cereal. Nine of the 10 most sugary cereals in our review are products aimed at kids, and 30 of the kids' cereals we looked at are high in sugars (containing 15% or more sugars). Aldi's GoldenVale-branded Honey Wheats, Choco Rice and Choco Pillows and Kellogg's Frosties pack the biggest sugar punch, all containing more than 40% sugar – that's over three teaspoons of sugar in a 30g serving.

What's perhaps more surprising is that four of the eight saltiest cereals (containing at least 600mg sodium per 100g) are ones marketed to children.

73%
of the 41 kids' cereals we looked at are high in sugars

A single 30g serving of Coles Rice Puffs or Woolworths Homebrand Rice Pops provides about a quarter of the daily sodium requirements of a nine to 13-year-old. In other words, many cereals targeted specifically at kids have more in common with treat foods than a nutritious breakfast.

Salt shakedown

In March 2010, Cereal Partners Worldwide (Nestlé), Sanitarium, Kellogg's, Aldi, Coles and Woolworths, as members of the federal government's Food and Health Dialogue, committed to reduce the sodium content of breakfast cereals that exceed 400mg per 100g by 15% over four years, and we've already seen some positive action as a result.

Corn Flakes and Rice Bubbles are the latest in a line of Kellogg's cereals to have their sodium content reduced – both by 20%. Sanitarium reduced the sodium content of its Skippy Corn Flakes by 25%. And Aldi's GoldenVale Breakfast Bubbles, the saltiest cereal in our last review (*CHOICE*, February 2011), recently had a 30% reduction in its sodium content. Yet despite these reductions, all four cereals remain among the saltiest on test. Such changes are a step in the right direction – and we welcome the sodium reductions across the breakfast cereal category as a whole that have occurred in recent years – but there's still room for improvement.

CHOICE verdict

There have certainly been some nutritional improvements in breakfast cereals since our last review. But too many still don't deserve their healthy image – and once again kids are getting a raw deal.

Carman's Fine Foods, Freedom Foods, Kellogg's Australia, Nestlé Australia, Popina Foods and Sanitarium (which together produce about 80% of the breakfast cereal bought in Australia) recently launched the Australian Breakfast Cereal Manufacturers Forum. It's designed to promote the health benefits and value that breakfast cereal can offer to consumers, but we think more energy should be devoted to reducing the sodium and sugar content of cereals – particularly those targeted at children.

WHAT TO BUY

For everyday eating, the best choices are cereals that rate very high or high for fibre (those with moderate fibre are also suitable for kids) but don't contain much salt, sugar or saturated fat – see the tables on pages 18-20 for details. All up, we counted 36 out of 195 cereals that fit the bill; hopefully there's one to satisfy your taste buds among these. The following cereals stand out from the crowd as they're not only high or very high in fibre, but contain minimal salt, sugars and saturated fat to boot.

- **Abundant Earth** Puffed Corn
- **Uncle Tobys** Shredded Wheat
- **Healtheries** Pufferbillies
- **Sanitarium** Weet-Bix for Kids

CEREAL CHECKLIST

✔ **CHOOSE High fibre** Dietary fibre helps maintain a healthy digestive system and decrease the risk of bowel cancer. On average, Aussies consume 18-25g of fibre daily, but we should be consuming more (25g for women, 30g for men). Choosing a high or very high fibre breakfast cereal will set you on your way to meeting your daily fibre needs.

✘ **AVOID High sodium (salt)** Sodium is linked to high blood pressure and an increased risk of heart disease. Australians consume 2150mg of sodium a day on average, but adults only need 460mg-920mg (children need even less) to meet our body's requirements. About 80% of the salt in our diets comes from processed foods, and breakfast cereal is one of the major culprits.

✘ **High sugar** More than half the cereals we reviewed contain a lot of sugar (15g per 100g or more), and kids' cereals in particular are major offenders. In some instances, dried fruit – which provides fibre, vitamins and minerals – contributes to the total sugar, and we've highlighted this in the table. But frequently the culprit is added sugars. A recent study divided children randomly into two groups, where one was offered a selection of high-sugar cereals and the other low-sugar options. Both groups were also offered sugar packets and fresh fruit. Children in the high-sugar group consumed almost twice the amount of refined sugar as those in the low-sguar group (24.4 vs 12.5g) whereas those in the low-sugar group were more likely to add fruit to their cereal. Both groups of children said they liked the cereals they chose.

✘ **High saturated fat** Breakfast cereals generally aren't high in saturated fat, but watch out for ingredients such as coconut or palm oil, which can increase saturated fat levels.

For a nutritional breakdown of all 195 cereals we looked at, go to **choice.com.au/cereals**

GENERAL CEREALS – VERY HIGH FIBRE

	Serving size (g)	Total dietary fibre (g/100g)	Energy (kJ/100g)	Sat fat (g/100g)	Sugars (g/100g)	Sodium (mg/100g)
Uncle Tobys Bran Plus	45	39.5	1300	1.1 ●	13.7 ▲	390 ▲
GoldenVale (Aldi) Just Bran	45	35.8	1320	0.8 ●	17.0 ■	365 ▲
Woolworths Homebrand Processed Bran	35	35.1	1390	1.2 ●	8.8 ▲	275 ▲
Kellogg's All-Bran Original	45	29.5	1370	0.5 ●	13.6 ▲	380 ▲
Goodness Superfoods Protein 1st	45	29.4	1550	1.6 ▲	17.1 ■	49 ●
Goodness Superfoods Digestive 1st	45	25.7	1500	1.2 ●	29.9 ◆	56 ●
Vogel's Ultra Bran Soy & Linseed	45	25.5	1440	0.5 ●	14.1 ▲	320 ▲
Goodness Superfoods Heart 1st	45	23.4	1630	1.5 ●	18.7 ◆	42 ●
Uncle Tobys High Fibre Bites Honey	30	21.9	1473	0.7 ●	17.7 ■	365 ▲
Kellogg's Guardian	30	21.8	1440	0.3 ●	11.8 ▲	215 ▲

USING THE TABLE See page 20.

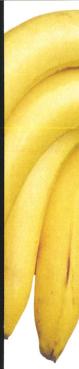
Spinning bowl

Breakfast cereal packets are plastered with a bewildering range of enticing claims designed to catch your eye and make you choose one product over another. But claims such as "no artificial colours or flavours", "contains wholegrain", "added vitamin and minerals", "source of fibre" and "99% fat-free" are often masking a cereal that's fibre-flimsy, contains too much salt or sugar or all of the above.

- **Watch out for a "source of" fibre/protein/antioxidants claims** This type of claim doesn't necessarily mean the cereal contains beneficial amounts of these nutrients. Products containing as little as 1.5g of fibre per serving can claim to be a "source of fibre", according to the Nutrient Claims Code of Practice, for example. Check the nutrition information panel to see how much of a nutrient is actually in the product.
- **Read the ingredients list** The words "whole" or "wholegrain" in the first ingredient mean the cereal is often less processed and will contain more of the grain's natural constituents, including vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. The list is also useful for identifying sources of added sugars (such as glucose syrup or honey) or when the sugar comes from fruit, as well as when the fat is the healthy, polyunsaturated kind (coming from nuts and seeds).
- **Vitamin and mineral claims** Most cereals have added vitamins and minerals, including those that are unhealthy in every other way. While cereals can be a significant source of these micronutrients for some people, particularly children, make your shortlist based on high fibre and lower salt, sugar and fat before considering vitamins and minerals.

WHAT ABOUT PORRIDGE AND MUESLI?

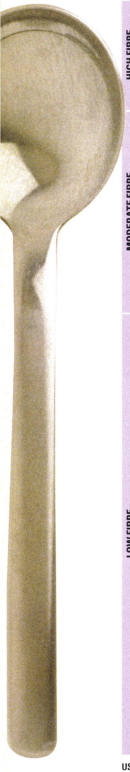
It's hard to see past porridge as a good family breakfast – a cup of cooked rolled oats gives you about 4g of fibre, and the only sugar and salt content is what you add. But aside from the handful of flavoured and sweetened varieties on the market, porridge is porridge, so it's not included in this review. Muesli also isn't included as it's a product category unto itself – we looked at 159 muesli's in our last review (see *CHOICE*, September 2011). ▸



GENERAL CEREALS – HIGH FIBRE

	Serving size (g)	Total dietary fibre (g/100g)	Energy (kJ/100g)	Sat fat (g/100g)	Sugars (g/100g)	Sodium (mg/100g)
Kellogg's All-Bran Wheat Flakes	40	19.2	1430	0.5 ●	10.5 ▲	395 ▲
Nature's Path Organic Heritage Flakes	30	18.3	1670	0.3 ●	11.7 ▲	447 ▲
Sanitarium Weet-Bix Hi-Bran	40 (2 biscuits)	18.3	1490	3.3 ▲	8.5 ▲	406 ▲
Wholeflakes by Artisse Organic Agave Spelt Flakes	45	18.0	1480	<1 ●	3.0 ●	400 ▲
Kapai Puku Original Blend	50	16.8	1920	3.4 ▲	10.8 ▲	13 ●
Back to Nature Hi-Lo Active (A)	30	16.7	1520	<1 ●	6.7 ▲	183 ▲
Uncle Tobys Plus Fibre	40	15.9	1430	0.3 ●	24.6 ◆	135 ▲
Kellogg's All-Bran Honey Almond	45	15.6	1530	0.5 ●	26.1 ■	325 ▲
Kellogg's Special K Advantage	40	15.6	1480	0.1 ●	18.5 ■	335 ▲
Coles Bran Flakes with Sultanas	45	15.3	1430	0.3 ●	32.2 ◆	400 ▲
GoldenVale (Aldi) Bran & Sultanas	40	15.3	1430	0.5 ●	32.1 ◆	360 ▲
Kellogg's All-Bran Apple Crunch	45	15.2	1510	0.4 ●	19.7 ◆	350 ▲
Freelicious Fibre Up Flakes	40	15.0	1518	0.6 ●	8.5 ▲	300 ▲
Kellogg's Sultana Bran	45	14.9	1410	0.4 ●	22.7 ◆	270 ▲
Nu-Vit Rice Bran	30	14.7	1690	1.8 ▲	4.0 ●	23 ●
Back to Nature Heart Harmony (A)	30	13.3	1630	<1 ●	16.7 ■	200 ▲
Abundant Earth Puffed Corn	14	13.2	1610	<1 ●	1.0 ●	<5 ●
Uncle Tobys Shredded Wheat	47 (2 biscuits)	13.2	1490	0.4 ●	2.0 ●	10 ●
Woolworths Select Great Start Bran & Sultana	45	13.2	1440	0.7 ●	28.6 ◆	395 ▲
Uncle Tobys Vita Brits	33.3 (2 biscuits)	12.6	1470	0.4 ●	0.4 ●	400 ▲
Kellogg's Mini-Wheats 5 Grain	40	12.2	1510	0.3 ●	8.8 ▲	5 ●
IGA Signature Wheat Flakes	30	12.0	1520	1.1 ●	1.1 ●	400 ▲
Uncle Tobys Vita Brits Weeties	30	12.0	1520	1.1 ●	1.1 ●	400 ▲
Be Natural Manuka Honey Spice Clusters & Flakes	45	11.5	1610	0.8 ●	15.2 ■	225 ▲
Uncle Tobys Oat Brits	41.7 (2 biscuits)	11.4	1570	1.1 ●	0.8 ●	253 ▲
Coles Right Start Fruit & Fibre	45	11.3	1520	0.6 ●	18.7 ◆	220 ▲
Uncle Tobys Plus Sports	40	11.3	1470	0.5 ●	23.8 ◆	281 ▲
Weight Watchers Fruit & Fibre Tropical	45	11.3	1510	1.5 ●	15.1 ◆	330 ▲
Black & Gold Wheat Biscuits	30	11.0	1470	<1 ●	2.8 ●	280 ▲
Coles Smart Buy Wheat Biscuits	31 (2 biscuits)	11.0	1530	0.3 ●	0.8 ●	385 ▲
Sanitarium Weet-Bix	30 (2 biscuits)	11.0	1490	0.3 ●	3.3 ●	290 ▲
Sanitarium Weet-Bix Organic	30 (2 biscuits)	11.0	1490	0.3 ●	3.3 ●	290 ▲
Coles Whole Wheat Biscuits	30 (2 biscuits)	10.9	1590	0.4 ●	2.7 ●	270 ▲
Uncle Tobys HealthWise for Heart Wellbeing	45	10.9	1600	1.1 ●	30.1 ◆	300 ▲
Macro Wholefoods Market Morning Balance	45	10.8	1670	2.3 ▲	17.4 ◆	57 ●
Be Natural Pink Lady Apple & Flame Raisin	45	10.7	1580	0.6 ●	22.7 ◆	195 ▲
GoldenVale (Aldi) Wholegrain Hoops (A)	30	10.7	1550	0.5 ●	17.5 ■	132 ▲
Be Natural Cashew, Almond, Hazelnut & Coconut	45	10.6	1810	3.9 ▲	14.0 ▲	185 ▲
GoldenVale (Aldi) Wheat Biscuits	31 (2 biscuits)	10.5	1510	0.4 ●	2.7 ●	270 ▲
Uncle Tobys Plus Muesli Flakes	40	10.5	1508	0.9 ●	24.2 ◆	285 ▲
Woolworths Homebrand Wheat Biscuits	31 (2 biscuits)	10.5	1510	0.4 ●	2.7 ●	270 ▲
GoldenVale (Aldi) Fruity Flakes Cereal Fruit & Fibre	40	10.4	1510	0.4 ●	25.8 ◆	346 ▲
Uncle Tobys Cheerios Honey & Oats	30	10.3	1590	0.7 ●	21.8 ■	300 ▲
GoldenVale (Aldi) Healthy Start Fruit & Nut (B)	45	10.1	1720	6.2 ■	16.5 ◆	195 ▲
Kellogg's Mini-Wheats Mixed Berry Flavour (A)	40	10.1	1450	0.3 ●	11.1 ◆	10 ●
Uncle Tobys Cheerios	30	10.1	1580	0.6 ●	16.3 ■	295 ▲
Nature's Path Organic Mesa Sunrise (B)	30	10.0	1610	<1 ●	13.0 ▲	412 ▲
Nature's Path Organic Spelt	30	10.0	1536	0 ●	13.3 ▲	500 ▲
Weetabix Whole Wheat Biscuits	37.5	10.0	1432	0.6 ●	4.4 ●	260 ▲

USING THE TABLE See page 20.



CHILDREN'S CEREALS

		Serving size (g)	Total dietary fibre (g/100g)	Energy (kJ/100g)	Sat fat (g/100g)	Sugars (g/100g)	Sodium (mg/100g)
HIGH FIBRE	**Healtheries** Pufferbillies (A)	20	16.0	1550	0.6 ●	4.0 ●	16 ●
	Kellogg's Sultana Bran Buds	45	15.7	1400	0.4 ●	25.1 ◢	135 ▲
	Sanitarium Weet-Bix for Kids	30 (2 biscuits)	11.0	1480	0.3 ●	2.9 ●	20 ●
	Freedom Foods Cocoa Puffs	35	10.9	1530	0.5 ●	21.2 ■	239 ▲
	Freedom Foods Rice Puffs	35	10.2	1540	0.4 ●	6.5 ▲	172 ▲
	Healtheries Ooby Doos (A)	30	10.2	1560	0.2 ●	5.0 ●	300 ▲
MODERATE FIBRE	**Basco** Honey Rings	40	9.5	1470	<1 ●	23.1 ■	74 ●
	Nestlé Nesquik	30	8.2	1610	0.9 ●	29.6 ■	250 ▲
	Nestlé Milo	30	7.8	1630	1.5 ●	27.2 ■	120 ●
	Freedom Foods Blushing Banana Berry Crunch	40	7.6	1550	<.1 ●	12.7 ◢	17 ●
	Nestlé Milo Duo	30	7.2	1620	1.2 ●	28.2 ■	105 ●
	Freedom Foods Tropico's	35	6.8	1560	0.6 ●	21.6 ■	114 ●
	Nestlé Milo Crunchy Bites	30	6.8	1610	1.2 ●	24.2 ■	120 ●
	GoldenVale (Aldi) Choco Chips	30	6.3	1620	1.8 ▲	34.0 ■	138 ▲
	EnviroKidz Organic Gorilla Munch	30	5.9	1600	<1 ●	26.0 ■	359 ▲
	EnviroKidz Organic Koala Crisp	30	5.1	1630	<1 ●	36.0 ■	448 ▲
	Sanitarium Honey Weets	30	5.0	1550	0.2 ●	23.0 ■	35 ●
LOW FIBRE	**GoldenVale** (Aldi) Choco Balls (C)	30	4.5	1670	2.4 ▲	25.8 ■	281 ▲
	GoldenVale (Aldi) Honey Wheats (C)	30	4.3	1630	0.5 ●	46.0 ■	<5 ●
	Ecor Cocoa Corn Flakes	30	4.2	1604	0.6 ●	26.3 ■	400 ▲
	Woolworths Homebrand Fruity Rings	30	4.0	1580	0.3 ●	26.4 ■	253 ▲
	Orgran Itsy Bitsy Cocoa O's	25	3.8	1370	0.2 ●	18.8 ■	300 ▲
	Back to Nature Waffle Bitez (A)	30	3.3	1556	<1 ●	10.0 ▲	765 ■
	Kellogg's Coco Pops Chex	30	3.3	1570	0.2 ●	32.1 ■	495 ▲
	Lowan Cocoa Bombs (C)	35	3.0	1630	1.3 ●	29.8 ■	130 ▲
	Coles Cocoa Puffs (C)	30	2.7	1650	0.9 ●	39.5 ■	310 ▲
	GoldenVale (Aldi) Choco Pillows (C)	30	2.6	1970	6.9 ■	40.6 ■	113 ●
	Kellogg's Froot Loops	30	2.4	1640	0.5 ●	38.0 ■	400 ▲
	Ecor Millet Rings	30	1.8	1628	0.5 ●	6.6 ▲	190 ▲
	GoldenVale (Aldi) Breakfast Bubbles (C)	30	1.5	1620	0.3 ●	10.0 ▲	550 ▲
	Kellogg's Frosties	30	1.5	1610	<0.1 ●	41.3 ■	350 ▲
	Coles Rice Puffs (C)	30	1.4	1580	0.4 ●	10.0 ▲	650 ■
	Woolworths Homebrand Rice Pops (C)	30	1.4	1580	0.4 ●	10.0 ▲	650 ■
	GoldenVale (Aldi) Choco Rice (C)	30	1.3	1600	0.5 ●	45.5 ■	546 ▲
	Kellogg's Coco Pops	30	1.2	1610	0.2 ●	36.5 ■	465 ▲
	Woolworths Homebrand Cocoa Puffs (C)	30	1.2	1630	0.7 ●	38.0 ■	440 ▲
	Kellogg's Rice Bubbles	30	1.1	1600	0.1 ●	9.0 ▲	550 ▲
	Kellogg's Crispix (B)	30	1.0	1630	0.1 ●	24.0 ■	725 ■
	Back to Nature Cookie Bitez	30	<1	1480	<1 ●	26.7 ■	450 ▲
	Black & Gold Cocoa Orbits	35	<1	1680	0.7 ●	27.6 ■	322 ▲
	Black & Gold Fruity Rings	30	<1	1600	0.3 ●	26.4 ■	255 ▲

USING THE TABLES Nutrient data is taken from the on-pack nutrition information panel. **Fibre** The cereals are ranked by dietary fibre content, as you should be able to rely on cereal to make a real contribution to your daily fibre needs. Very high = at least 20% fibre. High = 10%-19.9% fibre. Moderate = 5%-9.9% fibre. Low = less than 5% fibre. **Traffic light criteria** are based on the latest nutrition recommendations and dietary guidelines established by government health experts in Australia and internationally. Traffic lights allow you to compare the products at a glance and identify those that contain a little ● a moderate amount ▲ or a lot ■ of key nutrients of public concern. **Saturated fat (g/100g)** ●≤1.5, ▲1.6-4.9, ■≥5. **Sugars (g/100g)** ●≤5, ▲5.1-14.9, ■≥15. ◢ or ◢ indicates that fruit sugar contributes to the total. **Sodium (mg/100g)** ●≤120, ▲121-599, ■≥600. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Discontinued, but may be available in some stores. **(B)** Formulation will change in the next few months. **(C)** The dietary fibre figure is based on testing conducted by an external laboratory as the manufacturer did not provide this information.

The battle of the bulge

Karina Bray looks at what may be making us fat

At its simplest, we get fat if we suffer an energy imbalance – that is, if the energy we eat exceeds the energy we burn off. But it's clearly more complex than that, with some people gaining weight far more readily than others who have an apparently similar lifestyle. It's generally accepted that while some genes may predispose people to obesity, obesity is not inevitable. Rather, it's an interaction between genetics, lifestyle and environment.

Some of the more recent avenues of research into obesity include looking at systemic inflammation, the role of our gut bacteria and environmental contaminants. Here we look at some of this research, and how it relates to the modern obesity crisis.

It's generally accepted that while some genes may predispose people to obesity, obesity is not inevitable

Inflammation

Research over the past two decades has shown that obesity and other metabolic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, are linked with a chronic low-grade systemic inflammation. This inflammation has various physiological effects, including changes to glucose and fat metabolism that lead to insulin resistance and weight gain.

Inflammation can be detected by measuring inflammation-related chemicals in the blood. Researchers have found that a diet high in saturated and trans fats, sugar and high glycaemic index foods, as well as modern processed or modified foods, is associated with this inflammation. Fruit and vegetables, fish and fish oil, nuts, olive oil and herbs and spices seem to have an anti-inflammatory effect. Drinks including tea, wine and beer appear to have anti-inflammatory effects as well, though too much alcohol has been associated with increased inflammation.

Did you know?

An increasing body of research shows that the amount of sitting we do, irrespective of other activity, causes inflammation

Foods with high energy density and/or low satiety – which feature prominently among foods associated with inflammation – can result in weight gain and, ultimately, obesity – which itself has a pro-inflammatory effect. Weight loss, however, has an anti-inflammatory effect. Your overall diet, particularly energy balance, is therefore important, and can contribute to inflammation.

Physical activity can have an anti-inflammatory effect too, although the dose makes the poison: too much (in terms of duration and intensity) or too little (regardless of a person's weight) exercise can be inflammatory.

IMAGE: ISTOCK PHOTO

EDCs and other contaminants

Chemicals known to have an effect on our hormone (endocrine) system are called endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), and may also be linked with obesity. These include certain phthalates, which are found in plastics, cosmetics and fragrances; dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene (DDE), a chemical formed during the breakdown of the once widely used dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) organochlorine pesticide; polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a banned persistent organic pollutant once used in various industrial and manufacturing applications; dioxins, industrial and combustion-related chemicals; and possibly bisphenol A. And it's not just in humans – studies have found that low-level environmental contamination of these so-called "obesogens" may be linked with weight gain in other mammals.

Obesogens, which are stored in fatty tissue, are thought to act via an inflammatory effect, but may also exert their effects on the genes of a developing foetus, and changes may be passed on to subsequent generations.

Microbiome

Most people know about the so-called good and bad bacteria living in our gut, which may become unbalanced if we're sick or take certain medications. Collectively called the microbiome – considered by some to be an "organ" in its own right – the bacteria in and on us comprise about two kilograms of our body weight and these bacteria outnumber human cells 10 to one.

It's becoming increasingly apparent that the microbiome is linked with metabolism and metabolic diseases, including type 2 diabetes and obesity. It's known that obese and lean people have different bacterial profiles, though whether this is a cause or effect of obesity is unknown. For example, when sterile (bacteria-free) lean mice are exposed to bacteria from obese mice, they get fat, despite there being no change to their energy intake – suggesting it's the bacteria that causes obesity. The use of antibiotics in children and in agricultural medicine has also been linked with obesity.

There are several theories as to how the microbiome may cause obesity. Certain bacteria – the ones more predominant in obese people – are better at extracting energy from food for the host, leading to weight gain. It's also been suggested that the microbiome is linked with obesity through inflammation (see page 21). Other theories relate to chemical or hormonal communications between the host and the microbiome, or the regulation by the microbiome of host genes related to energy expenditure and storage. Most likely it's a combination of several effects.

It's known that obese and lean people have different bacterial profiles, though whether this is a cause or effect of obesity is unknown

Small trials in which microbe-rich faecal matter is transplanted from healthy individuals into the lower intestine of people with colitis have been successful in treating the disease, leading some to suggest similar treatment for obesity and type 2 diabetes. However, there are far too many unknowns at this point, such as which bacteria are beneficial and which pathogenic, and whether artificially changing someone's microbiome may cause other problems. It's more likely other treatments will be developed, possibly involving microbial supplements of helpful bacteria, perhaps in combination with antibiotics targeting undesirable bacteria, or else drugs that mimic their actions.

Amish people walk an average of about 16,000 steps a day as opposed to the average Australian adult's approximately 9000 steps

Inactivity

Physical activity is important for weight control, but most people – about 60% – don't get enough, according to the ABS. Cardio exercise, such as walking or jogging, burns energy as you're doing it, while resistance training or weightlifting results in increased muscle mass, which boosts your metabolism so you're burning more energy even when you're not exercising. Yet the modern workplace, personal motorised transport and labour-saving devices all mean we don't need to use our muscles much anymore for everyday activities.

Old-order Amish people, who live much like our pre-industrial revolution forebears did, walk an average of about 16,000 steps a day as opposed to the average Australian adult's approximately 9000 steps and the average American's 5000. Rates of obesity among these Amish are correspondingly lower, despite having a diet high in saturated fat and refined sugar.

Our leisure activities – computers, gaming and TV – are also becoming increasingly more sedentary. Time spent viewing television has been associated with obesity in children, though not necessarily because of lack of physical activity. Rather, it seems to be because of the snack food eaten while watching, or because of food ads shown on TV that entice us to eat after watching TV – possibly by increasing levels of the appetite-stimulating hormone ghrelin.

Stress

Many of us know the feeling of wanting to eat something when we feel stressed, and preferably something high in fat and/or sugar – it's a form of emotional eating. While eating tasty food may make you feel a little better, there's actually a chemical cascade going on within us that makes us want to do this – with the unfortunate effect of potentially inducing weight gain.

When you suffer from chronic stress, your body increases its production of cortisol. Higher levels can be useful because they prepare the body for action by increasing blood sugar and insulin release, providing an energy burst. However, prolonged, abnormally high levels of cortisol are a problem, because it increases appetite and also causes the elevated blood sugar to be stored as fat that is likely to be deposited in the abdomen. Stress also increases the release of a neurotransmitter called neuropeptide Y, which has a double-whammy weight gain effect of increasing appetite and conserving energy. At the same time, leptin, which helps control the effects of neuropeptide Y, is decreased.

Choosing some low-fat foods may result in weight gain because the fat may be replaced with sugar to make it tastier

Diet

A popular myth, often used to promote low-carbohydrate diets, is that advice to follow a low-fat diet has failed, resulting in population weight gain despite eating less fat. Fat, it's argued, has been unfairly demonised, and carbohydrates are to blame. While it's true that the percentage of total kilojoules, or energy, we receive from fat has decreased, we're eating more kilojoules than ever, and the absolute amount of fat has in fact increased in the past few decades.

However, choosing some low-fat or reduced-fat processed foods – such as ice-cream, biscuits or flavoured yoghurt – may result in weight gain because the fat may be replaced with sugar to make it tastier. So these can (though don't always) contain as many kilojoules as regular-fat products – but because they're "low fat", people think they can eat more of them. This doesn't mean low-fat products should be avoided – many reduced-fat dairy products such as milk and cheese contain as much or more protein and calcium than their regular-fat counterparts, but less fat (much of which is saturated) and fewer kilojoules.

It's easy to blame high-fat and/or sugar junk food such as ice-cream, biscuits, chocolate, pizza, soft drink and chips for weight gain, but eating excessive amounts of energy-dense healthy foods instead – muesli, dried fruit, nuts, seeds and dairy foods – may also cause weight gain. And meals that appear to be healthy and low-kilojoule, such as salad, may conceal high-fat dressing, croutons, hard cheese and fatty meats. Fruit juice may also be a problem; measure for measure, juice contains more nutrients than fizzy drinks or beer, but the energy content is similar.

Kilojoule for kilojoule, the time of day when you eat doesn't seem to make much difference. But it may affect how much and what you eat, which could lead to weight gain. Studies show that people who eat a good breakfast within a couple of hours of waking are less likely to be overweight that those who don't – and, conversely, that breakfast-skippers are more likely to be overweight, probably because they eat high-fat or high-sugar foods later in the day. If you eat well earlier in the day, you may have more energy to be more active during your waking hours, ultimately burning more energy.

Other studies have found that many overweight people overeat at night, and night-time meals are often fattier than other meals. This is especially true for those who eat lightly during the day, when they over-compensate for the lack of food. And many people gorge on junk food later in the day when they're tired, stressed or overwhelmed. But any weight gain would be due to excess kilojoules rather than the time of day. ■

Sleeping patterns

Consistently sleeping too little (less than six hours) or too long (more than eight hours) has been shown to increase the risk of obesity, as well as other diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Levels of the hunger-stimulating hormone ghrelin tend to be higher in sleep-deprived people, while the appetite control hormone leptin is lower than in those who sleep the average amount. This means people who sleep less tend to eat more – especially carbohydrate-rich or fatty foods – and they more than compensate for the extra energy required for being awake longer. At the same time, people who are hungry tend to sleep less – so going on a food-deprivation diet could be counter-productive.

Detox in a box?

Do these off-the-shelf detox products purge toxins or just your wallet? **Elise Dalley** finds out

The idea of a rapid detox that can take you from frumpy one day to trim and terrific the next pretty much sells itself. With summer just around the corner, a quick fix packaged neatly into one little box seems almost too good to be true. And according to the experts CHOICE spoke to, it probably is.

With a wide range of detox products available at your local pharmacy, celebrity eating plan pages popping up on your social media feeds and many books on the topic published this year alone, there's no doubt the business is a lucrative one. This year, Australians are predicted to spend $827.1m on diet products and weight loss services.

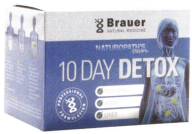
To find out where some of this money is going, CHOICE looked at 10 detox products available on pharmacy shelves (see right), ranging from mainstream supplement brand Blackmores, which claims its Kickstart Detoxification will help cleanse, purify and detoxify your organs, to a 48-hour detox drink promoted via scantily clad models, and even a Brauer homeopathic product sold with a natural fibre body exfoliator, which it claims promotes holistic body cleansing.

So, can herbal pills and fruit-based liquids really act as an "internal broom", or are these sweeping claims merely unfounded marketing spin?

Two wrongs...

There is little evidence detox diets actually remove toxins, according to accredited practising dietitian Melanie McGrice. She says this is a job your kidneys and liver do by themselves every day.

As director of Health Kick Nutrition and Dietetics, McGrice regularly sees patients who come to her "hoping to find a remedy" after a particularly poor period of eating or drinking. The problem is, the punishment of a strict "detox" diet doesn't really make up for the binge.



UNDER EXAMINATION

Bioglan Intense Cleanse, $19.99
Blackmores Kickstart Detox, $18.49
Totally Natural Quick Cleanse Detox Program, $49.95
4321 10 Day Body Boot Camp, $39.99
48hr Rapid Detox, $29.99
Brauer 10 Day Detox, $54.99
4321 Slim Evolution, $26.99
Skinny Mini 5 Day Detox and Weight Loss Program, $29.95
QuickTrim Fast Cleanse 48hr Super Diet Detox, $34.99
Lemon Detox, $89.95

New Year's Day

Google searches for "detox", "weight loss" and "diet" were higher on 1 January than any other day in the past 12 months

$827.1m

Amount Australians will spend this financial year on weight loss services*

60

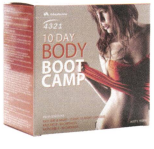
Number of "detox" products listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods

"People have this idea of a detox diet as a way of dealing with their guilt about having a diet that previously contained sugars, fats and or alcohol, but two wrongs don't make a right," McGrice says. "It may alleviate your guilt but it is actually doing more harm than good."

Most detox products spruik some kind of cleansing benefit for the liver or kidneys. In some cases, products encourage severe restrictions of key food groups, such as meat and dairy. Worryingly, others recommend eliminating food altogether. Accredited practising dietitian Kate Di Prima rejects the idea that you need a detox product to achieve a healthy liver. She says liver cleansing doesn't actually have to be a complicated process at all – all you need to do is avoid excessive amounts of alcohol, caffeine and saturated fats.

What's in the box?

You'll have heard the claims before – specially designed with this, professionally formulated from that. There are "rare combinations", "unique blends" and even "powerful super foods", all claimed to be the next big thing. But what's really in the box? Of the powders, potions and pills we looked at, most contain a combination of fruit and vegetable extracts, liver tonics, laxatives and traditional weight loss aids. And a number of the ingredients that popped up more than once were flagged by dietitians as being of particular interest.



Known for its ability to stimulate your central nervous system, **caffeine** is present in two of these products, most likely because of its ability to speed up your metabolism. It's generally accepted that the caffeine in two to four cups of coffee each day is harmless, however too much caffeine can make you anxious and may cause headaches or abnormal heart rhythms. While the 4321 Slim Evolution gives a precise measure for the amount of caffeine in each dose on its label, its sister product, the 4321 10 Day Body Boot Camp, does not. It's interesting to note that while some products give you added caffeine, others require it to be eliminated for the duration of the detox, which can cause headaches for those who regularly consume coffee.

The two 4321 products also contain **green tea**, considered to have antioxidant properties and the ability to improve mental alertness (most likely because of its caffeine content) and often used as a weight loss aid. But despite this, there is little reliable data to determine whether this age-old beverage will help to cleanse or cut the kilos.

Also said to speed up metabolism is **bitter orange**, a key ingredient in the Blackmores Kickstart Detox. Experts say there's not enough evidence to support the use of this ingredient for health purposes, particularly given reports of its links to fainting, heart attack and stroke. Bitter orange should be avoided by people with high blood pressure and should not be taken in conjunction with caffeine, yet the Kickstart Detox's packaging and the public summary of the product in the Australian Therapeutic Goods Register (ATRG) fail to contain such warnings.

Berries such as **acai**, **goji** and **cranberries** also appear in a number of products. Cranberries have known antioxidant properties and can help prevent urinary tract infections, although the evidence is not definitive and caution should be exercised by those who take blood-thinning drugs, such as warfarin and aspirin, in taking a product that contains cranberries. Goji berries should also be avoided by people on warfarin. There is no definitive scientific evidence to support the claims that acai berries, native to Central and South America and promoted widely as a "superfood", promote weight loss.

Di Prima says while there's nothing dangerous about most of these ingredients, the whole food is always going to be better than a single extract. As an example, beta-carotene, found in both of the 48-hour detoxes, appears to be associated with an increased risk of lung cancer in smokers when taken as a supplement, but eating a lot of beta carotene-containing fruits and vegetables is associated with a lower risk.

The inclusion of **psyllium** in the Totally Natural Quick Cleanse and Skinny Mini is designed to promote regular bowel movements. Although ▸

"People have this idea of a detox diet as a way of dealing with their guilt"

*SOURCE: IBISWORLD

Did you know?

One product that claims to help you beat bloating may actually have the exact opposite effect on some people

not harmful in itself, psyllium should not be taken with the common painkiller aspirin and people with diabetes, heart disease or high blood pressure should be especially cautious – although the product fails to provide this warning on its packaging. **Rhubarb** and **senna** are also used in some of the products to promote regular bowel movements. However, if you eat a sufficient amount of high-fibre foods, such as oats, grains and fruits, this should not be an issue for you.

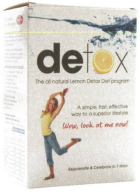
Silybin, the biologically active element of milk thistle, appears in the Bioglan Intense Cleanse and the Totally Natural Quick Cleanse. Historically thought to protect and improve liver function, laboratory studies suggest this could be correct, although clinical trials have not been able to link the two. Found naturally in meat and fish, **taurine** also appears in these two products. Taurine is thought to contain antioxidants and may improve liver function in patients with existing liver disease (hepatitis), however there's no evidence to support the idea that taurine can improve the function of a healthy liver.

The QuickTrim Fast Cleanse (endorsed by Kim and Khloe Kardashian) claims you'll slim down and lose your bloat in just 48 hours – although the fructose and soybean fibre may have exactly the opposite effect on some people, according to McGrice.

Chitosan, a dietary fibre derived from the shell of crustaceans, is popular in weight loss products for its ability to bind small amounts of fat into waste. As an ingredient in the 4321 10 Day Body Boot Camp, chitosan appeals to those looking to shed excess kilos, although this is not all it is capable of shedding. Chitosan does not distinguish between different types of fat, which means good fats, such as omega-3s, can also be lost in the process. More importantly, good-quality studies suggest the effect of chitosan on body weight is minimal. The US Food and Drug Administration warns directly against the use of chitosan, which it says may cause problems for those allergic to shellfish. McGrice says while chitosan may play a role in weight loss, "there are better things that can be done to improve metabolism, such as exercise".

Of the products we looked at, the majority came with the recommendation that the detox be undertaken in conjunction with a healthy eating plan. Di Prima says although the ingredients may not always have a scientific benefit, the upside of detox products is the way they encourage consumers to embark on new health regimes. "[On the detox], people will exercise more, eat better, cut out bad foods and lose weight. They attribute this to the tablet, but it is more likely actually the change to lifestyle that has made the difference."

A real lemon of a product



Dubbed an extreme and terrible dieting option by our dietitians due to its recommendation you eliminate all food for seven days, the Pure Natural lemon detox cost us $89.95 (plus the cost of a few lemons) at an inner city Sydney pharmacy. We decided to compare how much people are paying for this product, with the true cost of its ingredients, which likely have no real health benefits whatsoever. To buy similar ingredients from a supermarket – one litre of golden syrup, a packet of cayenne pepper, a 50 pack of senna laxative tablets and jar of sea salt – costs less than $25 (lemons not included).

Is there any regulation?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is the government body responsible for regulation of medicinal products. Products listed with the TGA are divided into two categories: registered goods and listed goods. All registered medicines, deemed to be of higher risk – such as prescription drugs – are individually assessed for efficacy and safety before they reach the shelf, while listed goods, considered to be of lesser risk, usually reach the shelf without any regulatory examination. Only about 20% of new listings in this category are randomly assessed each year for compliance with TGA requirements.

All the products we looked at are available over the counter in pharmacies, yet only three – the Bioglan Intense Cleanse, Blackmores Kickstart Detox and the Skinny Mini – are listed with the TGA.

Dr Ken Harvey, adjunct associate professor at La Trobe University's School of Public Health, wrote in a recent article published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* that the TGA fails when it comes to protecting consumers in the purpose it was established to achieve: to provide for a national system of controls relating to the quality, safety and efficacy of therapeutic goods.

Harvey recently succeeded in bringing a complaint before the Complaints Resolution Panel of the TGA's Advertising Code Council for misleading claims attached to a detox product. The claims made about Slimright 123 Detox n Burn that it would detoxify the body, reduce bloating and cleanse toxin build up were found to be misleading and likely to raise unwarranted expectations. Similar claims are attached to all these products, however only the products listed with the TGA can be regulated under the code.

The remaining seven products, formulated as liquids or powders, escape the ambit of regulation. Such products fall within the realm of Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ). FSANZ's Health Claims Standard, currently being updated, regulates high-level health claims attached to food products, including powder sachets and oral liquids clearly intended to be sold as diet detox products.

Our experts say that, in lieu of adequate regulation, the onus is on consumers to look out for words used in conjunction with claims on these products, such as "aids" and "assists", effectively buying leeway for the manufacturers.

CHOICE verdict

Do you really have to pay to get your insides back into shape? The short answer is no, you can probably achieve better results with a longer-term, sustained healthy eating plan.

"People are spending a lot of money on herbs, vitamins and minerals [in these products] when you can get actually get a very healthy lifestyle from exercise, plenty of sleep, lots of water and good food," Di Prima says.

Harvey, meanwhile, is unequivocal about these products: "Do not waste your money." ■

To buy similar ingredients from a supermarket – one litre of golden syrup, a packet of cayenne pepper, a 50 pack of senna laxative tablets and jar of sea salt – costs less than $25

We trialled some of these products. To see how we went, along with a CHOICE- recommended healthy eating plan, log on to **choice.com.au/detoxbox**

Shades of difference

While these sunglasses look the same and cost the the same, only one pair was correctly labelled

Which pair of sunnies will best protect your eyes against the harsh Australian sun? **Kate Browne** investigates

What kind of sunglasses person are you? Do you buy expensive designer shades or pick up a cheap pair on your local market stall? Or do you purchase them in a retail fashion store, chemist or even a service station?

While most of us know how important sunscreen and hats are for UV protection outdoors, the experts we spoke to say a decent pair of sunglasses is just as critical. So just how important are sunglasses to your health and what do you need to look for?

What to look for: a clearly marked swing tag listing the category, the standard and the supplier

Sight savers

Dr Ian Olver, CEO of Cancer Council Australia, says we should protect our eyes just as much as we protect our skin. "Sunglasses are important because of the exposure to UV we have in Australia."

Repeated exposure to UV radiation can cause a number of eye problems, including serious damage such as cataracts, pterygiums (overgrowth of tissue from the white of the eye onto the cornea), solar keratopathy (cloudiness of the cornea), cancer of the conjunctiva and skin cancer of the eyelids.

"You can develop melanomas on the surface of the eye, and one of the most sensitive places, skin-wise, is around the eyelids – we treat a lot of people with skin cancers around the eyes," says Dr Bill Glasson, president of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists.

What to look for

With designer frames costing upwards of $200, there's no shortage of options when it comes to expensive face furniture. But you don't need to spend a week's salary for shades that will protect your eyes from glare and, most importantly, UV rays.

Olver says that once a product meets Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003 Sunglasses and Fashion Spectacles and has a lens category of 2, preferably 3, price makes no difference. "It doesn't matter if the glasses cost $40 or $400 – it's the same protection."

All our experts also say wraparound styles are the safest option as they offer

more UV protection at the sides of the face.

A labelling labyrinth

According to the ACCC, all sunglasses sold in Australia must be tested and labelled according to the Australian standard. The regulator says it regularly looks at the products covered by mandatory standards and the bans it administers, and monitors compliance using a combination of visual assessment and testing. So far in 2012 the ACCC has recalled two product lines that didn't meet the standard. However, for the average shopper searching for a pair of sunglasses with the right level of protection, the vast array on offer can be very confusing.

CHOICE spent one morning at a large shopping centre looking at sunglasses priced from $25 to more than $300. While there were plenty of styles to choose from, what was difficult to navigate were the variations in labelling. Some had swing tags marked with the Australian standard, lens category number and a description of what that category is for as well as the name of manufacturer or supplier, as the standard requires. In other stores, however, the glasses only carried a sticker or tag with the lens category. Others had tags indicating the European standard and lens category, while at another store very few of the sunglasses for sale had any labels at all.

Olver's advice is to look for a clearly marked swing tag showing the AS/NZS 1067:2003 standard and the lens category – "most people should look for something marked lens category 3, which is suitable for most situations".

Did you know?

The dark tint on sunglasses has nothing to do with UV protection. Many fashion spectacles have dark-tinted lenses that may cut down on glare, but won't provide enough UV protection.

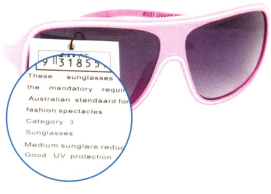
For more on sunglasses, including lens classifications, log on to **choice.com.au/sunglasses**

Professor Stephen Dain, from the University of NSW School of Optometry and Vision Science who is also the acting chair of the CS-053 Sunglasses Committee for Standards Australia, agrees labelling variations can make things difficult for consumers. He says you should look for a label with the lens category, description of that category and the details of the importer or distributor. He also advises buying sunglasses from well-known names or brands. "Buy from a retailer that has a name to defend – a recall is very damaging and usually tends to happen with small retailers who shut up shop quickly and disappear as a result." (It's worth noting, however, that the ACCC has conducted recalls on sunglasses from high-profile brands such as Fossil, Paris Miki and Nine West.)

Fashion victims

Another trap for consumers is products that look like sunglasses but are classified under the Australian standard as "fashion spectacles" only. These glasses provide very low sun glare protection and only some UV protection. They carry a lens category of 0 and are not required to be labelled. Lens category 1 glasses are also considered fashion spectacles and only provide limited sun glare and UV protection – these are labelled as "not suitable for driving at night".

"Fashion spectacles can be deceiving," argues Glasson. "I think it's a bit of a loophole as a lot of people don't know the difference." ■



Wear them out

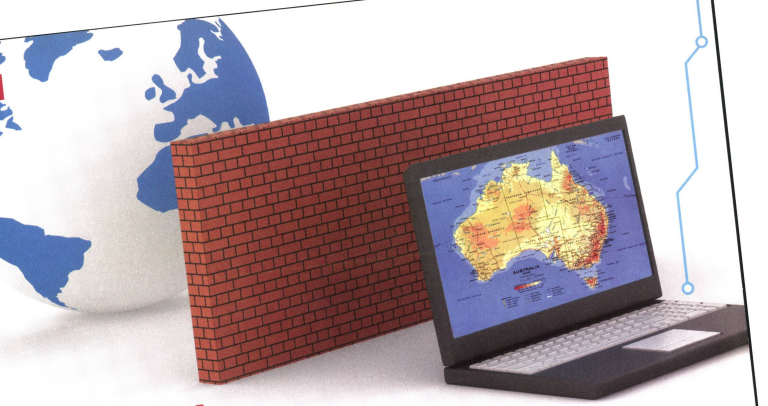
The experts we spoke to advise wearing sunglasses when you're outside most of the time in Australia. Here's a guide to the most critical places and times of the day.

During summer The level of UV radiation at noon in summer can be more than three times as high as in winter. More importantly, the levels of UVB – the type of UV that causes the most damage – can be as much as 10 times higher (which is why sunburn takes such a short time in summer).

Around noon (1pm during daylight saving). Seventy per cent of the harmful UVB radiation each day occurs within three hours either side of this time.

On the beach and on the water Near the beach there are usually few buildings or structures to block the sun or sky, so people are exposed to direct and scattered radiation from the whole sky as well as reflections from water.

High-altitude skiing Solar UV radiation increases with altitude, and at 2000m can be as much as 30% higher than at sea level. The high reflectivity of snow worsens the problem, so that the UV radiation dose to the eye can be quite large.



Shopping without walls

Elise Dalley explains how to avoid paying a premium when shopping from home

The internet is a borderless world – news, shopping and social interaction with people from all over the world is at our fingertips. But some online retailers haven't yet embraced this fact, relying instead on copyright and licensing restrictions to vary prices around the world – what's known as "geo-blocking".

While Amazon, Apple and Microsoft are among the main culprits, streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu also divide the globe into random segments, only to grant access to those with a certain IP address (the numerical address that identifies your computer).

Restricting access to content based on geographic location is a popular strategy used by multinational tech giants so they can set different prices in different regions of the globe. The frustrating reality of geo-blocking is common for Australian consumers, who are often charged hefty mark-ups on products from companies such as Apple, Microsoft and Amazon, based on their IP address.

A CHOICE analysis, conducted in June this year for a parliamentary inquiry into IT price discrimination and based on online prices of more than 200 products, found Australian consumers pay an average of 50% more for PC games, 34% more for software, 52% more for iTunes music, 41% more for computer hardware and a huge 88% more for Wii games than our US counterparts. Although these prices don't take into account the average 9.6% US sales tax (iTunes prices also don't include Australian GST), the mark-up remains considerable nonetheless.

Fortunately for Australian consumers there are other options that allow you to navigate your way around invisible boundaries to access more content and cheaper prices – see right.

47%

Mark-up on the Australian download of Windows 7 Home Premium (full version) compared with the US download

$16.99 vs $9.99

Australians pay 70% more than Americans to download a copy of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* from iTunes

Is it legal?

The legality of circumventing geo-blocking is a grey area. Some copyright experts claim those who promote devices or programs that encourage people to infringe copyright are breaking the law. However, CHOICE believes consumers who circumvent measures used to protect copyrighted content should be exempt from what could be construed as a breach of copyright simply because they're accessing products and services that are being provided knowingly and willingly by the copyright holder.

It is legal to use a virtual private network (VPN – see right) to protect your online transactions from hackers, and there's little definitive evidence as to whether other uses of a VPN breach copyright law.

It's also important to note that circumventing geo-blocks may breach the terms and conditions of the company you're buying from, and if discovered, your account could be cancelled, losing credit and access to your downloads.

According to the ACCC, your rights when dealing with overseas-based companies to buy products may not be protected by Australian law. While some companies, such as Apple, have international warranties, others, such as Canon and Nintendo, say they refuse to recognise products purchased internationally under domestic consumer law. ■

How do I...?

Get stuff shipped

The price is often right with online retailers until you reach the checkout, only to be told shipping to Australia isn't possible. Third-party delivery services, such as MyUS.com, Lil' Shoppa, Bongo and Australian-based company Price USA, remove physical shipping barriers, opening up new shopping opportunities for Australian consumers.

From computers to clothing, the basic principle is the same: you purchase the product, enter the warehouse address of the parcel-forwarding service you choose, and wait until they redirect the mail to your Australian address. Some companies, such as Price USA, actually buy the product on your behalf. To read more about third-party forwarding services, see **choice.com.au/parcelfowarding.**

Access movies, TV shows and software usually unavailable in Australia

Imagine a virtual tunnel from your lounge room to a computer in the US or UK capable of disguising your IP address and bringing you a constant stream of movies and TV shows, as well as access to heavily discounted software downloads. This is exactly what a virtual private network (VPN) does. As a client connecting to a VPN server that's in the same country as the site you're attempting to access, you have unimpeded access to services and purchases usually unavailable to Australian residents.

There are hundreds of free and paid VPN service providers available online. Some of the popular options include TorVPN, LogMeIn Hamachi, Hotspot Shield, HMA, IPVanish and Overplay. Opening the Netflix or Hulu webpage while connected to a VPN server in the US allows you to successfully set up an account if you use a legitimate US postal address.

The alternative to using a VPN is to adopt a US-based Domain Name System (DNS) server, such as unblock-us.com, for about $5 per month. Rerouting your internet connection through a DNS server – a simple configuration in your computer's network preferences – can also trick the site you're attempting to access into believing you are in fact elsewhere.

If documentaries or international news is your thing, you can access BBC iPlayer and international news networks, usually blocked here in Australia, in a similar way.

Play games online without feeling ripped off

It's no surprise that online gamers are keen to navigate their way around geo-blocks when the average cost of a game is 50% more in Australia. Access to the lower prices offered on the US version of online gaming service Steam is a difficult one to get around without a US credit card; however, the cheaper US prices for Play Station 3 online and Xbox LIVE can be accessed by purchasing prepaid vouchers that can be used to add credit to an account set up via a VPN if you also use a legitimate US address.

Set up a US iTunes account

In the US iTunes store, the Beatles' *No. 1* album sells for US$12.99, yet Australians fork out almost 60% more to buy it from an Australian IP address. To get around this, you can set up a US iTunes account by altering the country setting automatically detected when opening the iTunes store and entering a legitimate US address. To get around the US credit card requirement, it's possible to make your maiden purchase a free app and later top up your account with prepaid US iTunes store gift cards purchased from eBay.

Handle with care

In an increasingly disposable world, **Zoya Sheftalovich** rediscovers the art of caring for jewellery, shoes, clothing and leather goods

$23

Average weekly household spending on clothing and footwear in 1984

$44

Average weekly household spending on clothing and footwear in 2009/10

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

Australians spend a lot of money on clothes and footwear – according to the ABS, the average household forks out more on sartorial expression than on fuel and power. But despite this, many of us do not know the best way of making sure our clothing, shoes and accessories go the distance.

While price may reflect quality, and so longevity, there are several things that you can do to keep your items looking nicer for longer, regardless of how much they cost. If you want them to last, it's important to consider how you're going to protect your clothes, jewels and shoes before you wear them, and to think carefully about storage options and cleaning regimes.

The crown jewels

According to Ian Hadassin, CEO of the Jewellers Association of Australia, people forget that jewellery is fragile. "They take it for granted and think it can withstand almost anything, but jewellery can be damaged if it is not cared for properly. We appeal to consumers to look after their jewellery."

ALL THAT GLITTERS

Gold items get scratched, particularly those that are worn every day. Hadassin says gold rings and bracelets – bangles in particular – are most susceptible to being damaged. "If you're wearing a bangle or a ring you're going to be knocking it occasionally, and that's going to scratch the gold, which is not very hard." The only way to fix scratches is to have the jewellery polished, taking off a very fine layer of gold, by a professional every couple of years.

White gold is a different story. Because it doesn't tend to be particularly bright, most is rhodium-plated. As a result, Hadassin says the plating on a ring or bangle may come off within three to five years. "It depends on the quality of plating. As a lot of white gold that's sold in Australia is imported, how much you pay for your jewellery and where it comes from can make a difference."

As they don't tend to get knocked about as much, necklaces and earrings don't require polishing, and cleaning is usually sufficient. "You can often rinse it in soapy water and dry it off with a soft towel and tissue," says Hadassin. "Depending on the type of jewellery, you can clean it yourself."

ROMANCING THE STONE

Precious and semi-precious stones have varying characteristics and may suffer from incorrect care. Diamonds and many other stones are relatively easy to clean with a toothbrush dipped in soapy water. However, turquoise, amber, coral, and opal doublets and triplets should never come into contact with water.

Hadassin also warns, "Water can affect glue. Any stone that is glued into place in an item of jewellery [as opposed to being held in place by metal claws or a bezel] should not come into contact with water."

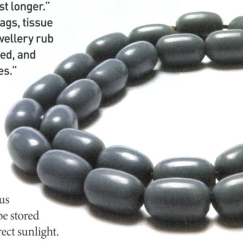
You can also take diamond pieces to a jeweller to be steam-cleaned or placed in an ultrasonic cleaner. But according to Hadassin, "you have to be very careful with some coloured stones because they can't take the heat". Amber, emeralds, garnets, jade, opals, pearls, peridots and rubies should never be put into ultrasonic machines or steam-cleaned.

Stones set in jewellery can be vulnerable, and as a result jewels can fall out and get lost. Hadassin says settings should be professionally checked every one to two years in rings and bracelets, as gold can wear down, pieces might be bumped or scraped and settings loosened as a result.

IN THE VAULT

Jewellery can last a long time if well cared-for and thoughtfully purchased. However, "you can't expect items that have moving parts which rub together to last a lifetime," says Hadassin. "For example, necklaces with links will rub together and get thinner and thinner, and if they start out extremely thin, they won't take long to wear through. Thick links last longer."

Jewellery can be stored in zip-lock plastic bags, tissue paper, or their original gift boxes. "Don't let jewellery rub against other jewellery. Stones can be scratched, and diamonds in particular will scratch other stones."



PEARLS VS PERFUME

Jewellery and perfume don't mix well; you should apply perfume before putting jewellery on. "If you wear a lot of perfume, rinse off or wipe jewellery after you've worn it because it could affect the stone and even gold," says Hadassin. Pearls and perfume are a particularly bad combination. "Perfume affects pearls quite badly, and once damaged they can't be repaired. If you're wearing a pearl necklace, don't wear perfume on your neck. Every time you take off a pearl necklace, you should wipe it gently. Gold you can always repair and diamonds are quite hardy, but if perfume starts to eat into a pearl, you have to replace it."

DRESSING UP

Costume jewellery can be particularly susceptible to damage, as plastic, glass and wood tend to be less hardy materials than precious metal and stones. It should be stored in a dry location without direct sunlight. To prevent oxidisation and discolouration, metal jewellery can be stored in zip-lock bags. Costume jewellery should also be kept away from perfume. To clean, use warm water and a cloth or toothbrush, and ensure the piece is dried thoroughly before being stored.

Water-resistant leathers can be cleaned by wiping their surface with a damp cloth or very diluted soapy water solution. Coloured shoe polishes can cover a multitude of sins, such as scuffs.

Suede can be cleaned by brushing dirt and grime with a suede brush, or by a professional shoe repairer.

Hell for leather

Coatings are applied to leathers to increase their stain and wear resistance. According to accessory retailer Mimco, "the principle of good leather care is to maintain these coatings for as long as possible. When allowed to build up, grime, dust, body oils and food stains can break down the coatings, which may change the condition and appearance of your leather item."

Before applying any leather protection products, it is important to understand there are several different types of leather, with differing properties and needs. Some are treated to make them water-repellent, while others, such as suede, absorb water. These absorbent leathers should be treated with a protective product to improve water and stain resistance, though in some cases this can darken the leather. To find out what type of leather your shoes are made from, check with the sales assistant or log on to all-about-leather.co.uk/.

Sometimes, a leather product will need to be professionally cleaned. In this case, the UK-based BLC Leather Technology Centre recommends seeking the help of a drycleaner with specialist skills in leather. "Dry-cleaning is a complicated process where important oils are removed from leather during dry-cleaning. Normally these oils will lubricate the leather fibres, keeping them soft, but their partial removal can leave garments feeling firmer and lighter in appearance after dry-cleaning. The drycleaner therefore needs to put oil back into the garment after cleaning to soften the garment and bring it back (as near as possible) to its original feel and colour."

Leather of all types should be stored in breathable material rather than in plastic. If a leather item has become wet, hang it to dry naturally, away from direct heat.

A shoe-in

You get what you pay for when you buy shoes, according to leather shoe specialist Gido Theilig. "Cheaper shoes will use cheaper components that won't naturally be able to withstand strenuous conditions. Good leather conditioning products can help to ensure longevity, but this is closely related to the price point of the shoes to a degree."

THE SKIN YOU'RE IN

You should apply a protecting balm to your shoes, but first identify the specific type of leather used. "It's important to identify the type of leather that makes up the shoe," says Theilig. "Products such as water and stain repellents are ideal for nubuck shoes, whereas most other shoes should ideally be treated using a conditioner that has particular characteristics. Applying the correct product prior to wearing shoes will set the stage for the weeks and months to come."

Clean your leather shoes regularly with a brush for absorbent leathers, such as suede, or a damp cloth for water-resistant leathers. After brushing or washing, apply a suitable conditioner to ensure the leather stays soft, has water-resistant properties and maintains a good finish.

ON THE NOSE

Sweaty, smelly shoes can be unpleasant, to say the least. And according to Theilig, products promising an end to smelly feet are not the answer. "Products on the market that supposedly 'freshen up' shoes wear off rapidly."

The key to preventing olfactory assault is buying quality products and regularly alternating shoes. "Cheaper shoes will be made with synthetic components that prevent uptake and distribution of the perspiration," says Theilig. "So feet literally swim in their own perspiration, especially in the warmer months."

Clothes horse

DON'T TREAT 'EM MEAN

In Australia, care labelling is regulated under a mandatory national standard. The standard covers clothing and goods made from textiles, plastic-coated fabrics, suede skins, leathers and furs. Manufacturers must provide information on appropriate and adequate care of the article, which when followed will not cause damage.

However, as CHOICE discovered during our investigation into dry-cleaning (see *CHOICE*, October 2010, or **choice.com.au/drycleaning**), labels are not always accurate. In addition, Jo-Ann Kellock, CEO of the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia (TFIA), says many consumers don't read care instruction labels properly.

Philip Johns, CEO of the Drycleaning Institute of Australia (DIA), agrees. "We don't expect the consumer to know about care labelling, [although] we are pleasantly surprised when they check the label."

According to the DIA, "There is some risk involved in using any care process not recommended by the manufacturer. Handwashing involves manual removal of soils with water, detergent and gentle squeezing action.

"A care label that calls for machine washing, on a delicate or gentle cycle, indicates that the soil can be removed with water, detergent or soap, slow agitation and reduced time in a washing machine... [washing clothes incorrectly is] in violation of the care label instruction and places responsibility on the cleaner rather than the manufacturer."

Clothes marked "dry-clean only" can shrink, change colour or lose shape if washed with water. Clothes that ought to be handwashed only may do the same when dry-cleaned.

Robin Monkhouse is a costume lecturer at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) who has more than 10,000 pieces of clothing under her control. "You have to decide whether something can handle a washing machine, even on a gentle cycle," she says. "If I've got something very delicate that I don't want to get torn or ripped I'll handwash it, but it's time-consuming."

For a list of care labels you might see while out and about, check out drycleanersweb.com.au/carelabels. And for information on how best to clean different types of fabrics, Kellock recommends visiting garmentcare.info/fabrics_by_fiber.

COLD STORAGE

If the oft-quoted adage that we wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time is true, a lot of our clothing spends a lot of time in the wardrobe.

Kellock believes "clothing shouldn't be treated like a disposable item" and recommends a common-sense approach when deciding whether to fold or hang up items. "Some things stretch on a hanger and others crease a lot if folded."

According to Monkhouse, the key is keeping down the number of clothes in your closet. "If you have too many clothes and they're all stuck close together in there, that's what pests love."

For clothes that do need to be hung up, Monkhouse says it is important to use the right type of hanger. "For special clothes, I use a very good wooden hanger. If I'm hanging up something fragile I put wadding on the hanger so the garment sits quite lightly." She says that for some pieces, such as wedding gowns, it's worth investing in a good garment bag.

Monkhouse also points out that wool and silk are particularly susceptible to pest attacks. "The more expensive and high-quality the wool is, the more moths love it. They also prefer dirty fabrics. If your fabrics are clean, it's much harder for them to destroy.

"If you haven't cleaned something properly or if there's sweat residue, that's where they'll go. Moths particularly love the crotches of men's woollen suits! If I haven't opened up a suit for a while that's where they'll start eating, so we dry-clean everything and I move things around. I get the moth ball satchels as well, which I hang on certain areas where I know moths hang around."

Power grab

Energy retailers are resorting to hard-sell tactics to increase market share, but is there much difference in what they have to offer? **Andy Kollmorgen** reports

It's not an easy time to be shopping around for an energy provider. With the cost of electricity rocketing and consumers scrambling for better options, retailers are trotting out special deals to try to lock in your business. We're deluged with marketing material, but whether it's a good idea to take the bait is far from certain.

In August, CHOICE reviewed a slew of online promotions and found, not surprisingly, that they aren't much help in making an informed decision. They often play on fears of drastic rate hikes, and the deals are far from straightforward. Energy Australia, AGL, Red Energy, Lumo, Origin and TRUenergy all entice consumers to sign contracts in exchange for a rate freeze, a one-off payment, a 10% or similar discount, a bonus point program, or some combination thereof. Many of the long-term contracts have complicated terms and conditions, warn of unspecified costs and impose early termination fees. Some promos only include usage; others both usage and delivery to your home (that is, the fixed cost onto which your usage charges are added) to your house.

Pay-on-time discounts are especially perplexing. In a typical example, Lumo offered a 13% discount on the company's "best rates" if customers pay on time, but it also says in the contract terms and conditions that "we may vary your energy charges for any reason". As with other offers, the Lumo deal appeared to be contingent on signing a contract that allows the retailer to raise prices, but we couldn't find these critical details in the online marketing material. By contrast, the number for the sales department on most of the ads was easy to spot.

And prices can go up in ways consumers might not expect. For instance, CHOICE member Geoff

Goonan recently told us that his Lumo off-peak charges "increased by a staggering 24.5%" with his latest bill, as opposed to 9.8% for peak charges.

were excluded from some of the promos we reviewed.

The marketing is confusing, and much of it has been down and dirty (see below).

has estimated that electricity prices across Australia will see an average annual growth rate of about nine per cent through 2013-14, with retailers

CHOICE member Geoff Goonan's Lumo off-peak charges "increased by a staggering 24.5%" with his latest bill,as opposed to 9.8% for peak charges

Variables at play

Another member, Nick Haggarty, told us he was shocked to find out his ActewAGL Greenchoice rates were going up in line with those of non-renewable energy customers – due in part to carbon pricing, according to the company.

"I completely understand that it's not possible to have two electricity networks, one from renewable sources and the other from non-renewables," Nick says. "What I don't understand is why my bills from ActewAGL have for years included a graph of my greenhouse gas emissions and every one of them has shown them to have been at zero tonnes."

Nick is not the only consumer we've heard from who's been mystified by retailer explanations of renewable pricing calculations. Renewable energy options

8%

of respondents to our 2012 energy survey rated their provider as "excellent"

14%

of respondents to our 2011 bank satisfaction survey rated their bank as "excellent"

Energy Australia's recent offer to lock in current rates for two years, for instance, is marketed along with a warning that electricity prices have increased more than 50% in Sydney in the past three years. Yet the independent Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)

free to go below any regulated increase in order to grab market share.

In late August, the launch of a Senate inquiry into the causes of high energy bills was announced, which will include looking at options to reduce prices. Around the same time, AEMC

Knocking your block off

Some energy marketing has been particularly aggressive. In March last year, for instance, AGL set out to lure at least 500,000 customers away from the competition with the launch of what it called "an aggressive sales and marketing campaign in NSW utilising many channels". At the time, AGL's GM of marketing, David Hamilton, said: "we intend to educate people about the fact that they can choose their retailer". (The lure to switch was a modest $300 off the regulated tariff over a three-year period in exchange for committing to a three-year contract.)

One marketing channel, AGL's door-knocking campaign, got the energy giant and independent marketing firm CPM into hot water and cast a revealing light on the current state of energy marketing. In March this year, the ACCC filed a suit against both and accused AGL of misleading and deceptive conduct and making "a range of false representations to consumers in the course of door-to-door selling". (Neighbourhood Energy, part of the Alinta group, and its former marketing company, Australian Green Credits, were also named in the suit.)

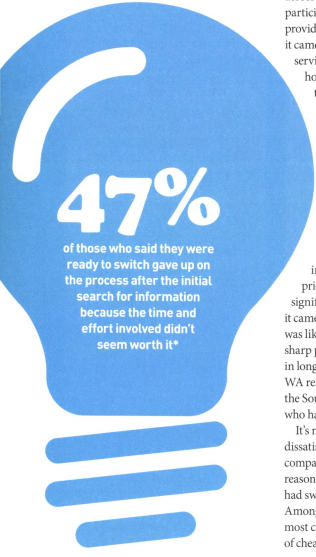
To prevent further transgressions, the ACCC said it and the Australian Energy Regulator had signed agreements with state and territory energy ombudsmen to allow greater scrutiny of the door-to-door marketing of energy products. But as recently as August, CPM was advertising for "residential field sales agents" to sell energy products at $18 per hour plus "uncapped commissions" and a chance for weekly and monthly bonuses based on sales. CPM said applicants need only learn some "simple procedures and selling techniques" and would be carted around neighbourhoods in a company van. Backpackers "fluent in English" were invited to apply.

In a recent report, the ACCC said one million door-knocking energy sales were attempted across Australia in 2011, usually by external marketing companies. This is an average of eight door knocks per year on every Australian household, with residents in NSW and Victoria likely to experience more than the average. The door-knocking epidemic has led to the introduction of a Do Not Knock bill, an idea that CHOICE strongly supports along with the Consumer Action Law Centre's Do Not Knock Campaign.

proposed new rules to strengthen regulation of distribution and transmission networks (the poles and wires that delivery electricity to your home, the expansion and upgrading of which are cited as the main cause of electricity price increases) with the aim of reducing consumer costs. And with the Prime Minister herself threatening to use the "big stick of regulation" if the industry doesn't figure out how to keep prices in check, consumers should be wary of price predictions, especially when they're made by energy retailers. It can be a good idea to lock in a rate, but first make sure you understand what you're locking in as well as all the terms and conditions of the deal.

Unfortunately for consumers, our survey findings suggest the rate chase is an endless and ultimately futile pursuit. One respondent summed up the attitude of many: "I am lost as to know who to use for electricity. They all have different offers, but the bills end up the same."

Retailers who stood out from the pack included TRUenergy, whose customers gave the company a significantly higher rating than other providers


47%
of those who said they were ready to switch gave up on the process after the initial search for information because the time and effort involved didn't seem worth it*

Same difference

CHOICE surveyed 1020 household decision-makers in July about their views on energy companies and discovered a low level of satisfaction with the industry across the board. The majority of survey participants who rated their retail providers were less than impressed when it came to value for money, customer service, helping them understand how to reduce usage, or keeping them up to date on key issues such as electricity prices. In all those categories, 25% or less of the respondents rated their provider as "very good" or better.

Retailers who stood out from the pack included TRUenergy, whose customers gave the company a significantly higher rating than those of other providers for keeping them informed on key issues such as prices; and Synergy, which was rated significantly lower than others when it came to value for money. (This rating was likely influenced by particularly sharp price hikes following adjustments in longstanding government subsidies for WA residents and Synergy customers on the South West Interconnected system, who have no other choice of retailer.)

It's no surprise, then, that dissatisfaction with their previous company was the second-most frequent reason cited by survey participants who had switched in the past three years. Among the reasons for switching, the most common, though, was the lure of cheaper rates.

Our survey results also undercut what has become an article of faith among energy retailers in Australia and beyond – that the unregulated market in Victoria is a model of competitiveness and customer value, since churn rates there are comparatively high. According to the most recent World Energy Retail Market Rankings by the energy think tank VaasaETT, switching rates in Victoria last year were the highest of the 38 international markets tested, at 28%, and, historically, the highest on record. Residents of Queensland, NSW and SA were also among the top 10 most-frequent switchers in the recent rankings.

But all the switching in Victoria may not have left consumers any better off. In our survey, Victorian consumers didn't rate their providers significantly higher than other states in most of the key areas we asked about, including value for money (Victorian retailers did, however, perform better than average when it comes to keeping customers up to date on issues, including prices). And in a recent Ernst & Young survey of 620 electricity customers across Victoria, NSW and Queensland, 47% of those who said they were ready to switch gave up on the process after the initial search for information because the time and effort involved didn't seem worth it.

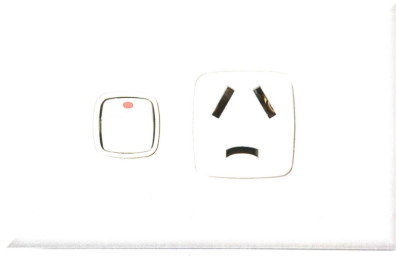
POWERING UP
For more practical tips and links to government comparison websites, log on to choice.com.au/electricityplan

*SOURCE: ERNST & YOUNG

Revealing responses

Our survey results suggest that many consumers are looking for a better deal but find it hard to know whether they've found one.

- **44%** of 413 survey participants who had joined their electricity retailer in the past three years felt they had compared all available options before choosing an energy provider, and only 52% of the 413 were confident they had made the best choice.
- **24%** of those who switched from another retailer said one reason was because of offers from telephone or door-to-door salespeople – the third-most frequently cited reason.
- **55%** of the switchers who responded to a direct marketing offer were not confident they made the best choice.
- **Five per cent** of those who switched said the sales staff switched their provider without their permission.



Contractual conundrums

STANDING OFFER CONTRACTS

You're on a standing offer electricity or gas contract if you move to a new address and accept whichever retailer is aligned with the energy distributor in that area. The terms and conditions of these default contracts are determined by state regulators, and prices will be the same in a given network area. The exception is Victoria, where prices are not regulated.

MARKET CONTRACTS

In states where you can choose among retailers (every state and territory except NT, Tasmania and parts of WA) you can opt for a market rather than standard offer contract. With market contracts, energy prices as well as terms and conditions vary between retailers. Market contacts generally offer discounted prices and other incentives (such as bonus point programs) as well as different billing and payment options, but can also impose start-up, exit and other fees.

We're calling for a code of conduct that ensures commercial switching sites are truly independent, accurate and comprehensive if advertised as such

What CHOICE wants

An independent website and call centre with nationwide reach that allows clear, simple and objective comparison of energy providers and plans so consumers can find ones that best suit their circumstances. One such resource, the Australian Energy Regulator's energymadeeasy.gov.au, already exists as part of the stalled National Energy Customer Framework, but politicisation of the energy issue and lack of consensus between states means only consumers in the ACT and Tasmania can use this site to compare providers and prices.

Access to standardised price fact sheets to help consumers compare complex energy products. This was planned for under the National Energy Customer Framework.

A national energy savings initiative to help households reduce costs.

A voluntary code of conduct for energy comparison websites that ensures commercial switching sites are truly independent, accurate and comprehensive if advertised as such.

CHOICE delivered a super complaint about energy comparison sites last year under a pilot program with NSW Fair Trading (see **choice.com.au/supercomplaint**).

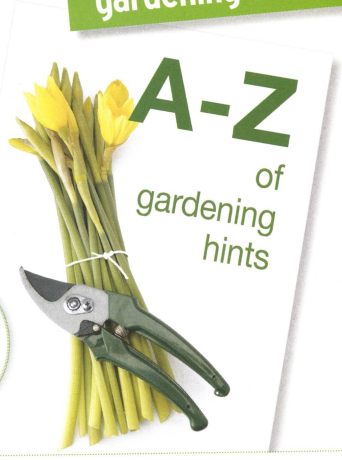
A resource by which consumers can access their own consumption data to help them to become more energy-efficient and encourage genuine competition and product differentiation in energy retailing.

CHOICE recently launched Take the Power Back – join this campaign at **choice.com.au/takethepowerback**. ■

Update your details and receive a FREE gardening book!

We want to ensure your details are always up to date so that we can contact you about news, events, offers and CHOICE updates.

Simply fill out the form below and we'll send you a free CHOICE book to say thank you.



Keen to go green?

Make sure you fill out your email address to receive communication from us online rather than through the mail.

Offer valid to 31 December 2012 or while stocks last

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

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Address:.....

Suburb:..... State:..... Postcode:.....

Email:.....

Phone:..... Mobile:.....

EMAIL WITH THE ABOVE DETAILS TO:
ausconsumer@choice.com.au
FAX TO:
02 9577 3355

MAIL TO:
CHOICE Customer Service
57 Carrington Road
Marrickville, NSW, 2204

choice
THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

The lowdown on lay-by

Lay-by can take the sting out of Christmas shopping, but make sure you're aware of the pitfalls, **Uta Mihm** warns

Nutshell

- *Lay-by can be a cheap and convenient way to budget, especially at Christmas.*
- *Beware of the fine print to avoid falling foul of tricky conditions, such as expensive cancellation fees.*

Do you remember when your mum bought her dinnerware and perhaps a new couch on lay-by? In these tricky financial times, and with increasingly credit-responsible consumers, old-fashioned lay-by appears to be making a comeback. According to Roy Morgan Research, almost 10% of consumers bought something on lay-by in the first three months of 2012 – more than double those who used an interest-free deal in the same period.

Lay-by is offered by all the large department stores as well as many small retailers, with items usually held for eight to 10 weeks (see page 42). But beware – if you change your mind you may be hit by a cancellation fee of up to 20%. Further, some stores had problems with the Christmas delivery of online and lay-by orders last year (see page 43).

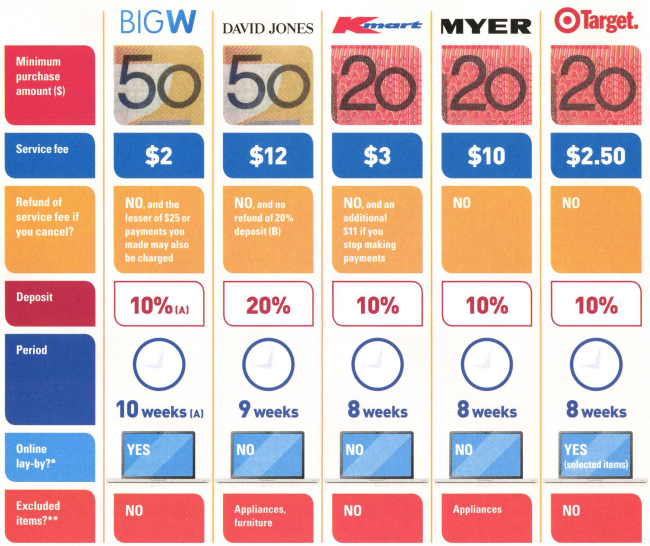
But as long as you're aware of the risks, lay-by can be great for Christmas shopping as it allows you to select your presents before popular gifts are snapped up and avoid the last-minute crowds.

Lay-by vs interest-free

As with an interest-free purchase, you can spread lay-by payments over several weeks or even months. But unlike with interest-free deals, you can only take the product home once it's been paid off. On the upside, lay-by fees are much lower than those for interest-free and you'll never be charged interest (as you may be if you don't abide by the strict payment plan of an interest-free deal – see *CHOICE*, Dec 11/Jan 12 or **choice.com.au/interestfreedeals**). You'll usually pay a 10-20% deposit for the goods and a small service fee may apply. As interest-free deals usually require an application and ongoing fees, lay-by can be much cheaper.

But lay-by can become expensive if you change your mind, as the service fee and sometimes also the deposit may not be refundable if you cancel or don't keep up the payments. However, if you just need a longer period to pay it off, ask the retailer ▸

Lay-by at the big stores



NOTES * Conditions may differ. ** Items other than clearance stock, gift cards and perishables, as they are normally excluded. **(A)** 5% deposit and 12-week period for pensioners. **(B)** No cancellation fee in the ACT.

as they'll often allow you to vary the payment terms.

From Lego to cruises

Almost everything is available on lay-by, but toys seem to be the best-sellers, with big department stores marketing lay-by during the annual July toy sales and also offering extended or deposit-free lay-bys for Christmas. Fashion is also popular. "You can lay-by goods you need later, for example, a dress for a wedding," suggests Russell Zimmerman, executive director of the Australian Retailers Association.

As well as department stores, smaller stores such as bookstores also offer lay-by. You can even lay-by tickets for a cruise holiday. Special online lay-by stores also offer a wide range of items – see above right.

Big-ticket items such as whitegoods and furniture aren't offered on lay-by by all stores that carry them. David Jones and Myer, for example, exclude all appliances from lay-by, although you may be able to get them on an interest-free deal.

What's the catch?

There are a number of drawbacks with lay-by.

- **Service fees ranging from $2-12 are charged** by the large department stores. But many smaller retailers don't charge a service fee.
- **Cancellation charges** David Jones, for example, keeps the 20% deposit and the service charge if you cancel your lay-by.
- **Lay-by is always at the original price** for products that might later go on sale.

Cash still king when buying online

We looked at a number of online sites offering lay-by: mylayby.com, laybystore.com.au and boredombusters.com.au. The first two offer a large range of items from appliances to furniture and holidays, while Boredom Busters specialises in family entertainment and gift cards. These sites don't charge service fees or a deposit, and My Layby and LayBy Store offer up to 52 weeks to pay the items off, much longer than traditional stores. While the stores sell most items at or close to the RRP, other online retailers offer some expensive appliances for hundreds of dollars less, especially if you're able to pay for them outright. And always check if you can get the item directly, how much it costs and what the payment terms are. For example, Boredom Busters sells tickets for the Sydney Harbour Bridge Climb at about a 10% premium, but you can get a 12-week lay-by from Bridge Climb directly with no extra cost. And My Big W Online offers the Apple iPod Touch 8GB for about 10% less than Layby and LayBy Store, as well as a 10-week lay-by period.

- **You may become an unsecured creditor** if a store goes into receivership before you've finalised the lay-by, making you last in line to get your money back.

CHOICE verdict

Lay-by can be a good way to budget, especially if there are low set-up fees and you're making a large purchase or buying lots of Christmas presents. But make sure you check the cancellation fees and only put things on lay-by you're really sure you want.

CHOICE has found some examples of stores charging a 20% cancellation fee and believes this may not constitute "reasonable cost" in some cases. Obviously, if you cancel the lay-by of a winter coat in August the retailer would have to discount the item in order to resell it, but if the item on lay-by is not seasonal, is reasonably small and readily available, the store's reasonable cost may not be very high, so it may be worth asking for a reduced fee.

While lay-by is often much better value than an interest-free deal, check whether you can buy the item outright as you may get a better price. Consider using a savings plan and a high-interest account, but make sure you stick with it and aren't tempted to use the money for something else. ■

Where are the presents?

When it comes to lay-by and online orders, things don't always go to plan. Last year, media reports gave voice to furious Big W and Target customers who were waiting for their Christmas presents to arrive after putting items on lay-by or ordering them online. Big W published an apology on Facebook on 19 December and Australia Post admitted to problems with Christmas deliveries from online retailers, calling it a "learning process".

Laying down your rights

- A purchase qualifies as a lay-by when two or more payments are made, including the deposit, and you don't receive the goods until they're paid off.
- The shop must give you a lay-by agreement setting out terms and conditions. If you cancel it, the trader can charge you a termination fee, but it can't be higher than the shop's reasonable costs.
- NSW Fair Trading received 54 complaints about lay-bys between 1 July 2011 and 15 August 2012, and the majority related to problems with cancellations and refunds. One consumer complained of being hit with a $1380 cancellation charge – the 20% deposit for a $6900 ring with no customisation work done on the ring. After NSW Fair Trading intervened, the jeweller relented and gave a full refund.
- A number of other complaints related to non-supply of goods. Queensland Fair Trading reports an incident regarding a lay-by for a $400 stereo; once it was paid off the consumer went to the store but was told the stereo had been lost. Instead, he was offered a different stereo with fewer features. The store had the originally ordered stereo on the shelf but said it would now cost $500 and could not be discounted. This store was acting illegally and the consumer was entitled to the stereo for $400.
- A store can't terminate a lay-by agreement unless you breach it – by missing a payment, for example – or they lose the goods through circumstances out of their control, such as a fire.
- Shops operating as franchises may have different lay-by conditions from store to store. Company-run BBQs Galore stores, for example, offer a lay-by with no service or cancellation fee. However, when we called one of their franchise stores, we were told the deposit would only be fully refundable if the lay-by was cancelled within the first seven days.

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Rachel Clemons

My local Foodland supermarket has recently expanded, and the eggs have been moved from a refrigerated to a non-refrigerated area. When I queried this, I was told eggs don't have to be refrigerated. Is this true?

CHOICE food expert Rachel Clemons responds: It's not mandatory for eggs to be refrigerated, but government health departments recommend they be stored in a fridge.

Eggs can be contaminated with low levels of bacteria (mainly salmonella) from the hen's faeces and feathers, and need to be handled properly to avoid risks of food-borne illness. Choose eggs with shells that are clean and free from visible dirt and feathers, and avoid buying cracked or broken eggs as bacteria may have spread to the egg inside.

Don't wash the eggs as this will make the shell porous, making it easier for bacteria to enter the egg. Use eggs prior to the date marked on the carton. The "best before" date assumes you're storing your eggs in the fridge – if not, you'll need to use them much sooner.

Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at ***asktheexperts@choice.com.au*** *or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.*

Chris Barnes

The Embertec SmartSwitch claims an average individual can save $200 per year using one. Does this claim stack up?

CHOICE energy savings expert Chris Barnes responds: This product is a monitoring device that detects and switches off devices which have been left in standby mode, and also automatically switches off devices not in use and then back on when needed. It's nothing like the dubious "energy savers" we've seen in the past, such as the 2011 Shonky winner Go4Green EnergySmart. As we haven't tested this particular product we can't vouch for the claimed savings of up to $200, but it probably will cut some cost from most households' electricity bills. Free installation is currently available in Victoria and SA under government energy saver schemes.

Steve Duncombe

Recently, I had to replace one of my printer's colour toner cartridges. I shopped around and discovered a new original cartridge costs $99.95 ($88.50 online) and a refilled cartridge costs about $75. Sooner or later I'll need all four cartridges replaced at a total cost of more than $300. Instead, I ordered an upgraded model of my printer for $145, complete with four cartridges.

Is this market manipulation to make the profit on the toner replacements – surely one full cartridge should not cost 61% of the cost of the printer?

CHOICE tech expert Steve Duncombe responds: Most printer manufacturers seem to adhere to the principle of selling the printer cheap and making up the profit on the consumables. However, when you buy a new printer, you aren't necessarily getting full standard toner cartridges with it, as some pre-installed starter cartridges don't carry anywhere near the same charge of toner that standard cartridges do.

You can save money by going with compatible cartridges. They should be comparable to the genuine ones in capacity but are manufactured by a third party and, in many cases, cost much less than original cartridges – especially if you purchase a "value pack" (four-cartridge set). Of course, manufacturers don't recommend using anything but original cartridges for quality reasons, and the compatible cartridge's mileage may vary depending on its make and model. ■

On Test

Vacuums, TVs, food processors and washers – they're all here

46 Vacuuming special
We test the latest floor stock of traditional, stick and robot vacs

52 Home theatre in a box
Find out why these entry-level systems underwhelm

55 Small TVs
In a tight space, these 80cm models might be just the right fit

58 Air conditioners
The right-sized model for your home

60 Food processors
They slice, chop, shred and whisk – we put 12 through their paces

64 CFL LEDs update
1000 hours and counting...

65 Cordless phones
How does that sound? We test call quality for both caller and receiver

68 Rechargeable batteries
Which NiMH batteries will last longer?

70 Washing machines
One model wastes more water than we've seen in a long time

Mix it with the best – see our latest test of food processors on page 60

CHOICE's Sam Butler is the undisputed king of the kitchen

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE Shopper
For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE subscriber number.

CHOICE Online
Wherever you see a mouse icon, there is more information about this test at **choice.com.au**.

CHOICE Best Buy
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

A clean sweep

Whether you're looking to deep-clean your carpets by hand or let a robot sweep your wooden floors, **Chris Barnes** unearths the right vacuum for you

The old adage of getting what you pay for rings true for vacuum cleaners – especially when it comes to cleaning carpets.

That's not to say the less expensive models are no good. Over the years, we've found almost all vacuums are excellent at cleaning hard floors, so cheaper models are good options if that's your main floor type. And all the newly tested models except the Cleanstar are excellent at removing pet hair from carpet (see table, page 48).

In the past, CHOICE has tested vacuum cleaners in three separate price categories – low-cost (up to about $300), mid-priced ($300-600) and expensive (more than $600). But from now on we'll be testing a mixture of all price categories in every test, so that we can more easily stay on top of all the latest models regardless of price. We'll be doing the same online to make life easier for our CHOICE Plus members too.

Nutshell

- We put 15 new standard vacuum cleaners, eight stick vacs and six robot vacs to the test.
- For thorough carpet cleaning, a standard vac is still the best option, but stick vacs and robots have their uses.

BARREL/ UPRIGHT VACS

WHAT TO BUY

EXPENSIVE

83%

Dyson Ball DC39 Animal

Good points

- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Excellent at cleaning corners and along edges
- Good range of tools with on-board storage for all of them
- Telescopic wand
- Washable HEPA filter

Bad points

- Irritating high-pitched noise
- The bin is messy to clean

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

EXPENSIVE

- **Sebo** Airbelt K3 Premium ($1099)
- **Zelmer** Solaris VZ5000HQ ($649)
- **Dyson** Stowaway DC23 Motorhead ($1099)
- **Electrolux** Ultra Active Cyclonic ZUA3861P ($649)
- **Electrolux** Ultra One S Bag Z8870P ($799)
- **Miele** S4812 Hybrid ($1099)
- **Bosch** Roxx'x Animal Sensor Bagless BGS6225AU ($799) (All in *CHOICE*, Feb 12)

MID-PRICED

- **Electrolux** Ultra Active ZUA3831PT ($499)
- **Miele** S6320 ($499) and S5311 ($529)
- **Vax** Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600 ($379) (All in *CHOICE*, Jun 12)

82%
Sebo Felix Premium

$999

Good points
- Excellent at picking up pet hair and dirt from carpet
- Good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Very long power cord
- Telescopic handle
- Variable power
- HEPA filter
- Excellent controls located at the fingertip

Bad points
- The cleaning head is tiring to move over the carpet
- The wand may become heavy for some with extended vacuuming

MID-PRICED

81%
Bosch Free'e Animal BSGL5244AU

$549

Good points
- Good at picking up dirt from carpet
- Excellent at picking up pet hair
- Good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Very long power cord
- Telescopic wand
- Variable power
- HEPA filter
- Excellent bag is easy to remove/replace

Bad points
- None to mention

LOW-COST

80%
Miele S2111

$299

Good points
- Best low-cost model on test for picking up dirt from carpet
- Excellent at removing pet hair
- Very good at cleaning corners and along edges
- Good range of tools with on-board storage for all of them
- Variable power
- Very good, long wand
- Excellent bag is easy to remove/replace

Bad points
- No telescopic wand

ABOUT THE REST

The other newly tested expensive models on test are good overall, but the **Hoover 7010PH Prestige** is only OK at cleaning corners and edges and the **Dyson Ball DC40 Allergy** doesn't remove dirt from carpet as well as recommended models.

Of the mid-priced models, the **Electrolux**, **Miele** and **Zelmer** are all good, but compared with the Bosch (above right), the Electrolux is less effective at cleaning corners and edges and the Miele less effective at removing pet hair. The Zelmer is only OK at picking up dirt from carpet.

Of the low-cost models, the **Nilfisk, Vax Power 6 VCP6B2000**, **Lumina Signature**, **Volta** and **Hoover Performer 3000** are good overall but only OK at removing dirt from carpet. The **Piranha** is borderline at dirt pick-up from carpet. The **Cleanstar,** the worst newly tested model, is poor at dirt removal from carpet and borderline at removing pet hair.

What to look for

- **Adjustable head height** allows you to adjust the height of the bristles on the cleaning head to the length of the carpet pile or for when you're vacuuming hard surfaces.
- **Standard tools** to check for are dusting, crevice and upholstery brushes. All models have onboard storage (except the Hoover 7010PH Prestige and Russell Hobbs), which can be convenient, although some only have storage for one or two tools.
- **Variable power/suction** allows you to lower suction for delicate jobs, such as cleaning curtains.
- **Telescopic wand** lets you adjust the wand to suit your height so you don't have to bend too much.
- **HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter** adheres to an international standard for filters that trap particles, useful if you have asthma or dust allergies.
- A **long cord,** so you're not changing power points, and a **neat compact design** for easy storage are also desirable.

		COSTS			PERFORMANCE							FEATURES
		Price ($)	Annual running cost ($)	Cost per bag ($)*	Overall score (%)	Dirt removal from carpet score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cleaning corners and edges score (%)	Pet hair removal score (%)	Noise (dB)	Carpet-hard floor head / power head / turbo brush /
	BARREL/UPRIGHT VACS										
EXPENSIVE	**Sebo** Airbelt K3 Premium	1099	18.30	4.15	88	92	82	80	100	71	✓/✓/-/✓
EXPENSIVE	• **Dyson** Ball DC39 Animal	949	15.30	na	83	75	80	90	100	73	-/-/✓/✓
EXPENSIVE	**Zelmer** Solaris VZ5000HQ	649	19.40	4.75	83	83	77	79	100	69	✓/✓/-/✓
EXPENSIVE	• **Sebo** Felix Premium	999	11.40	3.00	82	90	66	75	100	74	-/✓/-/✓
EXPENSIVE	**Dyson** Stowaway DC23 Motorhead	1099	15.80	na	82	84	75	70	100	77	-/✓/-/✓
EXPENSIVE	**Electrolux** Ultra Active Cyclonic ZUA3861P	649	19.70	na	82	81	76	80	100	72	-/✓/-/✓
EXPENSIVE	**Electrolux** Ultra One S-Bag Z8870P	799	19.00	4.30	82	80	76	80	100	68	-/✓/-/✓
EXPENSIVE	**Miele** Hybrid S4812	1099	18.80	5.00	81	75	79	80	100	68	✓/-/-/-
EXPENSIVE	**Bosch** Roxx'x Animal Sensor BGS6225AU	799	19.80	na	80	76	75	82	100	70	✓/-/✓/✓
EXPENSIVE	• **Hoover** 7010PH Prestige	749	14.10	na	77	79	71	62	100	71	-/✓/✓/✓
EXPENSIVE	**Miele** S7210	799	13.00	5.50	77	78	69	70	100	72	✓/✓/-/-
EXPENSIVE	**Sebo** Airbelt K1 Pet	740	17.60	4.15	76	57	84	84	100	70	✓/-/✓/-
EXPENSIVE	**Bissell** Healthy Home 61Z4-F	699	14.00	na	75	81	53	75	100	78	✓/-/✓/✓
EXPENSIVE	• **Dyson** Ball DC40 Allergy	849	12.40	na	74	68	66	80	100	77	✓/✓/-/-
EXPENSIVE	**Dyson** DC33	649	15.00	na	74	73	65	70	100	76	✓/✓/-/-
EXPENSIVE	**Dyson** Compact DC26 HEPA	600	12.00	na	69	53	81	85	70	73	✓/-/-/✓
MID-PRICED	• **Bosch** Free'e Animal BSGL5244AU	549	22.90	4.25	81	74	82	79	100	73	✓/-/✓/-
MID-PRICED	**Electrolux** Ultra Active ZUA3831PT	499	19.10	na	81	77	81	75	100	73	✓/-/✓/✓
MID-PRICED	**Miele** S6320 Compact Cat & Dog Expert	499	20.00	5.50	81	74	79	85	100	70	✓/-/✓/-
MID-PRICED	**Miele** S5311 Hard Floor Specialist	529	20.46	5.0	81	77	82	80	90	71	✓/-/-/✓
MID-PRICED	**Vax** Zen 2 Pet VCZP1600	379	16.70	na	80	72	81	80	100	70	✓/-/✓/-
MID-PRICED	• **Electrolux** Ultra Active Green ZUAG3802	399	14.60	na	78	74	81	70	90	70	✓/-/-/-
MID-PRICED	• **Miele** S6330	449	20.60	5.00	78	72	78	85	90	68	✓/-/-/✓
MID-PRICED	**Miele** S5211 Family Caretaker	429	20.57	5.00	77	77	81	76	70	68	✓/-/-/✓
MID-PRICED	**Samsung** Twin Chamber Super SC8820	399	19.10	na	76	62	86	70	100	75	✓/-/✓/✓
MID-PRICED	**Nilfisk** Power Allergy P40 9059908010	399	15.62	5	76	61	82	81	100	68	✓/-/✓/✓
MID-PRICED	• **Zelmer** Odyssey VZ450ST	329	14.20	5.00	76	60	82	81	100	70	✓/-/✓/✓
MID-PRICED	**Electrolux** Ultra Silencer ZUS3950P	399	15.30	4.00	74	73	79	71	70	65	✓/-/-/✓
MID-PRICED	**Hoover** Prestige 7010	449	12.90	na	73	65	84	75	70	66	✓/-/-/✓
MID-PRICED	**Bissell** Pet Hair Eraser Multi Cyclonic 10N6-F	309	15.20	na	65	60	58	54	100	82	-/✓/-/-
LOW-COST	**Miele** S2111	299	16.70	4.99	80	76	80	82	90	70	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	**Electrolux** Supercyclone ZSC6930	300	20.40	na	76	68	78	66	100	76	✓/-/✓/✓
LOW-COST	• **Nilfisk** Bravo 18451023	159	19.30	3.20	74	59	83	81	90	74	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	• **Vax** Power 6 VCP6B2000	199	18.10	na	74	58	81	85	90	75	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	**Vax** PowerPlus 3 Pet VPP1600P	299	16.70	na	74	55	78	90	100	72	✓/✓/✓/-
LOW-COST	• **Lumina** Signature 3019 VC-460 (Aldi)	100	18.80	na	73	63	80	69	90	73	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	• **Volta** Campus U4710F	170	19.00	2.00	73	62	77	75	90	75	✓/-/-/✓
LOW-COST	• **Hoover** Performer 3000	129	15.10	3.00	71	56	80	76	90	73	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	• **Piranha** Battler 2400W	69	19.10	na	70	54	74	86	90	82	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	**Piranha** Phantom 2400W	99	18.30	na	70	54	74	86	90	72	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	**Kambrook** Captiv G3 Pet KBV480	219	19.70	na	66	41	76	81	100	74	✓/-/✓/✓
LOW-COST	**Nilfisk** Meteor 12404911	329	18.50	na	62	29	78	81	100	73	✓/-/✓/✓
LOW-COST	• **Cleanstar** VC3509	129	13.20	na	59	42	81	70	50	76	✓/-/-/-
LOW-COST	**Russell Hobbs** HEPA Cyclonic RHF202S	99	16.20	na	54	41	75	70	30	82	✓/-/-/-

SPECIFICATIONS												
upholstery tool / dusting brush	Variable suction control	Variable power	HEPA filter	Type	Power (W, measured)	Dust collector	Reach from power point (m)	Weight (kg)	Measured dust collector volume (L)	Contact
✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Barrel	1600	Bag	9.6	9.8	1.9	sebo.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Barrel	1340	Bin	9.6	7.6	1.1	dyson.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1700	Bag	12.0	8.6	3.8	zelmer.com
✓/✓/-		✓	✓	Upright	1000	Bag	11.0	7.4	3.0	sebo.com.au
✓/✓/✓			✓	Barrel	1380	Bin	10.0	10.6	1.3	dyson.com.au
✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Barrel	1720	Bin	12.0	9.2	1.2	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Barrel	1660	Bag	12.0	10.0	3.0	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		Barrel	1640	Bag	8.6	8.3	1.9	miele.com.au
✓/✓/-		✓	✓	Barrel	1730	Bin	10.5	9.8	1.2	boschappliances.com.au
✓/✓/✓			✓	Barrel	1230	Bin	10.0	8.7	1.1	hooverfloorcare.com.au
✓/✓/✓		✓		Upright	1130	Bag	11.3	9.7	4.6	miele.com.au
✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Barrel	1540	Bag	8.8	7.3	1.9	sebo.com.au
/-/✓			✓	Upright	1250	Bin	10.0	10.3	1.5	bissell.com.au
✓/✓/✓			✓	Upright	1080	Bin	8.2	6.6	0.9	dyson.com.au
✓/✓/✓				Upright	1340	Bin	10.0	7.8	1.7	dyson.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Barrel	1030	Bin	7.8	5.3	0.5	dyson.com.au
✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Barrel	2000	Bag	15.0	7.0	1.5	boschappliances.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1670	Bin	12.0	8.0	1.8	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		Barrel	1750	Bag	9.6	6.5	2.4	miele.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		Barrel	1790	Bag	9.8	8.2	3.0	miele.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Barrel	1460	Bin	11.3	8.1	2.2	vax.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1280	Bin	12.0	7.7	1.3	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1800	Bag	9.6	6.2	2.8	miele.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		Barrel	1800	Bag	9.8	7.9	3.0	miele.com.au
✓/✓/✓		✓	✓	Barrel	1670	Bin	10.0	7.2	2.0	samsung.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1370	Bag	11.4	8.7	1.8	nilfsk-advance.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1240	Bag	9.2	6.3	1.6	zelmer.com
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1340	Bag	12.0	7.8	2.1	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Barrel	1130	Bin	10.0	7.0	1.2	hooverfloorcare.com.au
✓/✓/✓			✓	Upright	1330	Bin	9.6	8.5	2.4	bissell.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	(A)	Barrel	1460	Bag	8.4	5.8	2.8	miele.com.au
✓/✓/-	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1780	Bin	8.8	7.2	1.6	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1690	Bag	10.4	8.0	2.4	nilfisk-advance.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1580	Bin	11.0	6.7	3.0	vax.com.au
/-/✓	✓		✓	Barrel	1460	Bin	11.2	8.9	1.3	vax.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓		✓	Barrel	1640	Bin	10.5	8.4	1.5	aldi.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1660	Bag	8.0	6.2	2.4	electrolux.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		Barrel	1320	Bag	7.0	5.4	1.1	hooverfloorcare.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓			Barrel	1670	Bin	7.7	5.4	1.2	hegroup.com.au
✓/✓/-		✓	✓	Barrel	1600	Bin	8.0	7.2	2.0	kmart.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1720	Bin	8.0	6.3	0.6	kambrook.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1620	Bin	9.0	7.4	2.0	nilfisk-advance.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓		Barrel	1150	Bin	8.0	4.8	1.0	cleanstar.com.au
✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	Barrel	1420	Bin	8.0	5.8	1.0	salton.com.au

For more details, including previously tested models, log on to **choice.com.au/vacuums**

STICK VACS

A stick vacuum cleaner is a compact, lightweight alternative to a standard vacuum when you need to do some spot cleaning or just give your floor a quick going-over. All models on test except the Vax Revolution have a handheld vacuum at their heart – this is the actual motor unit of these stick vacs, and it can be separated for handheld use.

We don't expect stick vacs to perform as well at cleaning carpet as a standard vacuum cleaner. While we test them on carpet, we also test them on the spot-cleaning tasks they should excel at, including picking up spilled cornflakes, potting mix and flour from a hard floor, and cleaning a car in handheld mode.

What to look for

- **Light, quiet and easy to manoeuvre** over both carpet and hard surfaces.
- **Tools** Most stick vacs on test have a crevice tool; dusting brushes and upholstery tools are also useful. Only the Dyson has on-board storage for its tools, while the Russell Hobbs and Cleanstar have a built-in crevice tool.
- **Variable power/suction** allows you to lower the suction.
- **Charging and running time** Look for models that run for a useful length of time and don't take too long to charge. Some may need to charge overnight, or longer.

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of August 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of dirt removal from carpet (40%), ease of use (30%), cleaning corners and edges (15%) and pet hair removal (15%). All models score 100% in the scratch test. **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **Features** See What to Look For, page 47. **Annual running costs** are based on one hour's use per week at 22c/kWh. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. * Approximate. Usually available in packs of three or more. **na** Not applicable. **(A)** Optional extra.

76%
Dyson DC35 Multi Floor Stick Vac

Good points
- Good at cleaning corners and around edges
- Good at cleaning hard floors
- Excellent at removing pet hair
- Good at cleaning up sand and pebbles from a car floor

Bad points
- Borderline dirt pick up performance from carpet
- The on/off switch is tiring to use
- Comparatively expensive

		PERFORMANCE							
STICK VACS	**Price ($)**	**Overall score (%)**	**Hard floor dirt pick up performance (%)**	**Ease of use score (%)**	**Cleaning corners and edges score (%)**	**Pet hair removal score (%)**	**Dirt removal from carpet score (%)**	**Hand-held vac score (%, cm)***	**Noise (dB)**
Dyson DC35 Multi Floor Stick Vac	469	76	77	70	78	100	53	70	74
• **Electrolux** Ergorapido ZB2932	199	76	80	68	75	100	50	60	69
• **Electrolux** Ergorapido Plus ZB2941	299	75	80	68	75	100	46	60	72
• **Electrolux** Ergorapido Plus ZB2904	300	75	80	68	75	100	44	60	71
• **Hoover** Freejet 3 in1 19.2V	229	72	80	75	58	90	36	60	71
Volta Multi Master UB156D	139	68	63	74	65	90	35	60	72
• **Hoover** Heritage 5210	179	68	83	71	30	100	18	70	70
• **Cleanstar** CSV001 (A)	199	61	70	76	55	50	19	20	71
• **Russell Hobbs** RHSV1C (A)	140	61	70	76	55	50	19	20	71
Vax Revolution VS101	100	57	80	80	27	30	5	na	66
• **Bosch** Move 2in1 BBHMOVE4AU	249	54	37	74	60	60	23	20	74
Vax Super 2 1000	100	52	47	67	58	50	19	10	69

76%
Electrolux Ergorapido ZB2932

Good points
- Good at cleaning corners and around edges
- Very good at cleaning hard floors
- Excellent at removing pet hair
- Excellent controls

Bad points
- Borderline dirt pick-up performance from carpet
- Only OK at cleaning up sand and pebbles from a car floor

75%
Electrolux Ergorapido Plus ZB2941

Good points
- Good at cleaning corners and around edges
- Very good at cleaning hard floors
- Excellent at removing pet hair
- Excellent controls

Bad points
- Borderline dirt pick-up performance from carpet
- Only OK at cleaning up sand and pebbles from a car floor

75%
Electrolux Ergorapido Plus ZB2904X

Good points
- Good at cleaning corners and around edges
- Excellent at removing pet hair
- Very good at cleaning hard floors
- Excellent controls

Bad points
- Poor dirt pick-up performance from carpet
- Only OK at cleaning up sand and pebbles from a car floor

ABOUT THE REST

The other models aren't as good at removing dirt from carpet. They're also generally not as good at cleaning hard floors and removing pet hair – see the table (above) for scores.

:ATURES				SPECIFICATIONS						
head / brush head	Crevice / upholstery tool / dusting brush	Telescopic wand	Variable power	Folding handle	Battery type	Voltage (V)	Measured running time (min)	Claimed charging time (hours)	Weight (kg)	Contact
✓	✓/✓/✓		✓		Li-ion	22	9	3.5	2.2	dyson.com.au
✓	✓/-/✓		✓		NiMH	12	12	16	2.6	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓/-/✓		✓		Li-ion	18	12	4	2.5	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓/-/✓		✓		Li-ion	18	12	4	2.4	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓/-/✓				NiMH	19	25	ns	2.9	hooverfloorcare.com.au
/✓	✓/-/-	✓			Lead acid	6	17	8-10	2.7	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓/✓/✓			✓	ns	14	25	8	3.0	hooverfloorcare.com.au
✓	✓/-/-			✓	NiMH	12	18	12	2.6	cleanstar.com.au
✓	✓/-/-			✓	ns	12	18	12	2.6	russellhobbs.com.au
✓	-/-/-			✓	Ni-Cad	7	40	12	1.6	vax.com.au
✓	✓/-/-		✓	✓	NiMH	18	30	16	2.9	boschappliances.com.au
✓	-/-/-	✓			ns	12	19	ns	2.9	vax.com.au

USING THE TABLE
Price Recommended retail, as of August 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of hard floor dirt pick-up (30%), ease of use (30%), cleaning corners and edges (15%), pet hair removal (15%) and dirt removal from carpet (10%). All models score 100% in the scratch test. **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at about 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **Features** See What to Look For, page 49. **TABLE NOTES** * Handheld score isn't included in overall score. **ns** Not stated. All models have bins and can only be used to pick up dry material. **(A)** The Cleanstar CSV001 and Russell Hobbs RHSV1C appear identical except for colour.

66%
iRobot Roomba 530*

Good points
- Excellent at cleaning hard floor
- Good at picking up pet hair
- Very good at cleaning corners and edges
- Automatic return to charging station just before the battery goes flat
- Stairs detection

Bad points
- Very poor at picking up dirt from carpet
- No timer to program cleaning

* Recently discontinued but is available in some stores.

ROBOT VACS

Despite their sophisticated technology, robot vacs aren't very good at doing what a vacuum should do – removing dirt from carpet. They don't have the suction of a standard vacuum cleaner; even a mediocre standard vacuum removes far more dirt from carpet than any robot.

However, most robot vacs will leave your carpet looking clean, even when there is actually still a fair bit of dirt left behind. They pick up a reasonable amount of fluff such as pet hair along with some dirt, but also seem to push the remaining dirt deeper into the carpet pile. Still, most are excellent at cleaning hard floors – albeit not always in the corners and edges. For a house with mostly hard floors, most of the tested models will do a reasonable job of keeping your floors clean when run on a daily basis. Even in a home with carpeted floors, a robot can at least keep the carpet looking clean, but it will need regular going-over with a standard vac to get most of the dirt out. ■

What to look for
- A **virtual wall** is an accessory used to create an invisible barrier, for blocking off open doorways or other areas you don't want the robot to enter.
- **Programmable times** allow you to set times of the day or week to run the robot, for example while you're away at work.
- **Noise** The robots are generally quieter than standard vacs.

		PERFORMANCE					FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS					
ROBOT VACS	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Dirt removal from hard floor (%)	Dirt removal from carpet (%)	Cleaning corners and edges score (%)	Pet hair removal score (%)	Remote control	Programmable time / day of the week	Virtual wall	Weight (kg)	Charge time (hours)	Maximum operation time (min)	Battery	Noise measured on carpet / hard floor (dB)	Contact
iRobot Roomba 530	449	66	97	15	80	70		-/-	✓	3.7	3	60	NiMH 14.4V	60/68	1800 771 711
LG Roboking 2.0 VR6170LVM	999	61	98	6	80	50	✓	✓/-		3.2	3	100	Li-ion 16.8V	50/61	lge.com.au
Samsung Navibot SR8855	999	58	92	20	50	50	✓	✓/-	✓	3.7	2	90	NiMH 14.4V	56/62	samsung.com.au
iClebo Home YCR-M04-02	539	57	97	12	50	50	✓	✓/-		3.8	2	60	Li-ion 14.8V	54/62	alpharobot.com.au
Infinuvo QQ2 Plus	300	54	98	5	80	10	✓	✓/✓		2.9	3.5	80	NiMH 14.4V	65/69	aurobo.com.au
Robomaid RM-770	399	51	83	15	50	40	✓	✓/✓	✓	3.1	3	85	Li-ion 14.4V	62/70	robomaid.com.au

Outhouse performance

There's only one room for listening to these poor-performing home theatre systems, says **Matthew Steen**

Nutshell

- Entry level systems can be OK, but only provided you lower your expectations.
- Don't push these products by turning up the volume too high, or else you'll have distortion.

We can't deny these home-theatre-in-a-box systems pack in a lot of features at a very reasonable price. But when it comes to sound quality, prepare to be seriously underwhelmed.

When we pushed the models in our testing room by increasing the volume we were disappointed, and we expect you will be too. That's why we haven't recommended any of the models on test.

If you're willing to compromise on sound quality to this degree and plan to purchase one of these models, check out our guide on how to set up your room for the best possible results (see *CHOICE*, October 2011, pages 44-45). But we strongly recommend that you consider saving up that little bit more for better equipment.

Think small

These systems aren't designed for a large room – 1m x 2m is about their limit, which makes them better suited to a toilet than a lounge room!

			PERFORMANCE												FEATU	
			LISTENING PANEL													
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Stereo listening score (%)	Multi-channel music listening score (%)	Multi-channel movie listening score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby energy score (%)*	Damaged DVD playback score (%)**	Total standby energy consumption (W)*	Average DVD load time (secs)	Average BD load time (secs)	Claimed / measured maximum stereo output power (W)	Wi-Fi	Smartphone remote control
Sony BDV-N990W	799	53	56	38	42	53	100	99	0.9	15	31	250 / 81	✓	✓
Samsung HT-E5550W	799	52	51	42	47	56	80	36	1.1	9	25	330 / 188	✓	
Sony BDV-E690	550	52	38	51	38	58	100	99	0.5	13	34	250 / 154		✓
Panasonic SC-BTT790	799	50	60	51	56	57	0	66	15.8	19	30	370 / 214	✓	✓
Samsung HT-E4500	399	49	47	24	33	65	100	36	0.4	9	22	330 / 233	✓	
LG BH7520TW	799	46	33	29	42	52	100	99	0.7	10	21	360 / 208		✓
Panasonic SC-BTT490	599	46	38	47	56	58	10	66	9.8	18	28	370 / 218	✓	✓
LG BH6520TW	599	38	29	20	20	51	100	99	0.6	11	22	282 / 209		✓

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of August 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up listening panel (65%, equal parts 5.1 music speaker module (if applicable). ** Not included in overall score. **(A)** Optional. **D** Down. **L** Left. **F** Forward.

ADVERTISING PORKIES

The advertising on the box for most of these products makes claims of between 850-1100W RMS (see What to Look For, page 54), but manufacturers arrive at this figure by combining the power output of all speakers. If you push the systems by increasing the volume the result is distorted sound, so in reality if the figure on the box is achieved, it will result in a headache for the listener.

We also found a discrepancy between the standby energy claims of the two Panasonic systems and what we measured. We contacted Panasonic about this, as well as the government regulator, the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, but Panasonic hadn't responded by the time we went to press.

Most of these models have short cables for a reason – the speakers aren't designed to be placed very far from the listener. The cable lengths given in the table (below) indicate the maximum listening distance, and therefore the general size of the room in which the manufacturers claim you'll get a "cinema experience" – but you can expect this to be borderline at best for these models. The downside of short cabling is that your player will probably have to be located close to your TV.

Speaker power

None of the systems on test has powerful speakers – despite their claims – and they tend to distort the sound at very low power levels. If your living room is located somewhere noisy, you're likely to have to raise the volume and experience this annoying distortion as the speakers are pushed beyond their

Finding the sweet spot

Take a noise measurement of the space you plan to put one of these systems in – search for one of the many freely available apps for your smartphone that shows a measurement in decibels (dB). Should the app give readings of about 20-30dB, these systems might be suitable because you won't need to turn them up too much – any higher reading and you'll probably need to push them, increasing distortion and spoiling your experience.

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SPECIFICATIONS

iPod dock	HDMI inputs	Wireless surround speakers	Speaker impedance (ohms, nominal)	Playable DVD regions	Blu-ray disc player dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Front speaker dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Front speaker cable length (m)	Centre speaker dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Centre speaker cable length (m)	Surround speaker dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Surround speaker cable length (m)	Subwoofer speaker dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Subwoofer speaker cable length (m)	Subwoofer direction of fire	Contact
✓	2	✓	3	All	7.5 x 46 x 22	121 x 26 x 26	3.2	6 x 33 x 5.5	1.9	121 x 26 x 26	5.2	34 x 21 x 41	2.9	D	sony.com.au
✓	2	✓	3	2, 3, 4	5.5 x 43 x 29	120.5 x 25 x 25	3.1	7.5 x 36 x 7	2.9	120.5 x 25 x 25	3.2	35.5 x 16.5 x 29	4.0	L	samsung.com.au
✓			3	All	5 x 43 x 27.5	118.5 x 26 x 26	3.3	9 x 24 x 7	1.9	118.5 x 26 x 26	10.3	36 x 22.5 x 32	2.9	F	sony.com.au
✓	2	✓	3	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	4 x 43 x 28	119 x 29.5 x 29.5	3.5	8.5 x 28 x 7	1.9	119 x 29.5 x 29.5	3.5	41 x 18 x 30	2.9	D	panasonic.com.au
		(A)	3	2, 3, 4	6 x 43 x 26	14 x 9 x 7	3.0	8 x 23 x 7	3.1	11 x 8 x 7	7.0	35.5 x 16.5 x 29	4.0	L	samsung.com.au
		✓	4	2, 3, 4	7 x 44 x 32.5	120.5 x 25 x 25	2.2	9.5 x 33 x 7.5	2.8	120.5 x 25 x 25	4.3	34 x 25.5 x 35	2.7	F	lg.com.au
✓	2	(A)	3	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	4 x 43 x 28	119 x 29.5 x 29.5	3.5	8.5 x 28 x 7	1.9	14 x 8 x 7	7.9	41 x 18 x 30	2.9	D	panasonic.com.au
		✓	3	2, 3, 4	6 x 36 x 32.5	110.5 x 25 x 25	2.3	9.5 x 26.5 x 6.5	2.9	110.5 x 25 x 25	4.3	35.5 x 12.5 x 32.5	2.6	L	lg.com.au

ovie and stereo listening), ease of use (25%) and standby energy (10%). **Dimensions** are rounded up to the nearest 0.5cm. **TABLE NOTES** * Blu-ray disc player plus wireless surround

capacity. In this test, our listening panel had to ask us to turn the volume down below our previously used reference peak of 88dB because they could hear distortion, which gives you an idea of just how gutless some of the speakers are. We had to adjust our listening scoring accordingly because of the need to lower the volume.

We found that the Samsung HT-E5550W makes a potentially annoying audible clicking sound when playing from disc, so make sure you listen to a system before you buy it.

How we test

The listening panel is made up of at least three people with a background in either sound engineering or production. They're aware of the average price point of the products, but don't know the price point of each system. They listen to the same tracks at the same peak volume level for each system and agree on a score for each input type.

Each set of speakers is positioned in the same locations around the listening position and at around head height, except for the subwoofer, which is on the floor. The room is about 5m x 4m x 2.5m (D x W x H) and is acoustically similar to a reasonably sound-absorbent lounge room.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

An **iPod dock** is useful for connecting music directly from your iPod to the system. Some are built in and others are a separate dock that needs to be plugged into the system.

Wi-Fi connections via the Blu-ray player gives network connectivity and facilities such as those found on Smart TVs currently on the market. Access to various applications will depend on the brand you buy. All models on test have an ethernet port for a wired connection to your router.

Wireless surround speakers still need one wire for power. Some older houses may not have power sockets at both ends of the living room, but if you have a room with the requisite power sockets, these may be useful as long as you take their cable length limitations into account.

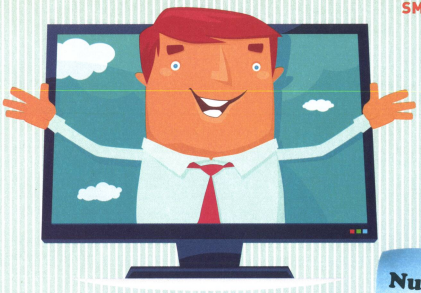
A **smartphone remote** can be useful if you want to operate your system from your mobile. You'll need to download an app from the store associated with your smartphone that gives you basic controls over the system.

RMS (root mean square) This applies to the power output figures for amplifiers. It's considered a better means of comparison than "peak" or "dynamic" power (often used in manufacturer specifications) as it's a better measure of the power an amp can deliver over a reasonable length of time rather than in very short bursts.

Listen before you buy Assessing sound equipment is a bit like wine tasting – it's more about the subtle variations that can make the experience anything from unacceptable to remarkable. The quality of sound a set of speakers can deliver varies with the characteristics of the room. It's very unlikely that your room will be exactly the same as the showroom, so take along your favourite CD or DVD to play it on the system in store. Unlike most smaller specialist stores, larger stores may not allow this, but might let you exchange the system if you're really unhappy with it when you get it home.

Subwoofers are bulky objects that sit on the floor, but they may not be as robust as they look. Downward-firing models have the speaker facing the floor with a relatively small opening at the bottom. This might offer some protection if you have pets who like sharpening their claws on fabric, or children who may push sharp items or their fingers into a forward-facing speaker.

Wall mounting is handy when space is limited – particularly for rear surround speakers. ■



Small is beautiful

Nutshell

- A lower price means fewer features, but shouldn't also mean poorer pictures or sound.
- Resolution is less important at this size than with larger TVs.

Television is for watching, not dominating a space. **Chris Ruggles** checks out some smaller options

More than 60% of households CHOICE recently surveyed have more than one TV. And while 80cm (32-inch) was once considered big enough for a TV in the living room, models this size are now more likely to be found in bedrooms or kitchens. That's not to say this size can't work as your main TV – and in small living spaces it's a sensible option.

Just because a TV isn't found in your main viewing room, doesn't mean its picture and sound quality should be compromised. Our tests assume that each TV will be used as your main TV, so it therefore has to perform well across inputs such as broadcast TV, DVD and Blu-ray.

As you'll see in our What to Buy List (page 56), it's possible to find a model with picture and sound good performance at a reasonable cost – the top-scoring LG 32CS460. But this is also the only model on test to manage a good score for sound – sound quality remains a problem for many TVs.

However, lower prices can mean fewer features. This is probably less of an issue for a second TV, but for your main TV it might be worth spending a bit more to ensure you get a TV with all the extras you need.

TUNING IN TO DIGITAL

Analog TV broadcasting is being switched off around the country. But although digital TV will provide extra channels, improved pictures and sound for most, the downside is that some areas that used to get a poor but better-than-nothing picture will now find they have a very poor, or even unwatchable, picture.

The causes of these problems can vary, and in some cases they'll be due to conditions that are outside your control. But there are some steps you can take that will improve things dramatically.

- Have your antenna and cabling checked by a qualified installer.
- Check for obstructions such as large trees between your antenna and the signal source.
- Make sure you're using good-quality connectors and shielded cabling, particularly if you're living near industrial areas.
- There's a list of government-approved installers and lots more information on what you can do if you can't get an adequate signal at dbcde.gov.au/television/Reception-difficulties-television.

If you (or someone you know) are on a full pension from Centrelink and haven't already switched to digital, you may be eligible for the federal government's Household Assistance Scheme, which will supply and install a set-top box as well as provide some training on how to use it. If you're in doubt about your eligibility, call 1800 20 10 13.

IMAGE: ISTOCK PHOTO

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Digital Living Network Alliance (DLNA) is a standard for networking electronic devices designed to make it easier for you to enjoy downloaded video, photos and music on products such as TVs, DVRs and Blu-ray/DVD players.

Refresh rate A true comparison in refresh rates between TVs can be an important indicator of how well the TV handles the fast moving objects in a scene. However, a recent marketing practice of displaying useless terms such as "800 Motion flow XR" or "200MHz Aquamotion backlight scanning system" on some LCD TVs is making a true comparison across brands and models difficult.

Input connections Check those on the TV match the output on the devices you want to hook up to it, such as a DVD player/recorder, cable TV or games console, and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time.

USB connection This can be useful for reading photos, video and music from your digital devices and is usually the storage for a TV with DVR function.

Electronic program guide (EPG) displays which programs will be shown over the next seven days and sometimes even longer. In most cases it can be used in conjunction with the USB recording (DVR) capabilities where available.

Screen resolution Higher numbers mean more pixels and therefore more detail. 1920 x 1080 is currently the highest resolution and is often referred to as 1080p. The p stands for progressive scanning, where the whole picture is shown at once as a complete video frame, compared with broadcast HD at 1080i, which interlaces one line after another in quick succession to build each video frame. With smaller TVs, 1920 x 1080 will really only be of benefit if you are normally very close to the screen. Lower resolutions can provide good image quality at distances of 1.5-2m.

3D programming Although 3D shouldn't be a feature that figures too highly in most people's buying decision, those TVs that have it tend to be pretty good performers overall.

LED backlighting can help reduce power consumption and produce areas of black with minimal light "bleed". But some LED backlight models have very inconsistent backlighting and poor black levels.

Viewing angles LCD TVs will lose some contrast as you move away from the centre, but the best will maintain an acceptable picture. The worst will have inaccurate colours and it'll be very difficult to see detail. In this size, at more than a couple of metres, it shouldn't be a big problem, but having a swivel stand can help in tight spots.

Wall mounting requires a separate mount. Make sure your wall is strong enough to handle the weight of the TV and look for models that will allow you to access the rear connections without having to take it off the wall.

Energy use The most important factor is the actual energy used, which is calculated based on 10 hours' use per day over 365 days. This includes energy used when the TV is on standby during the other 14 hours of the day.

WHAT TO BUY

SMALL (80CM) TVs

72%
LG 32CS460

Good points

- Good picture and sound quality

Bad points

- No composite video input
- Only one HDMI and analog video input
- No VGA, digital audio output or headphones output
- No readily accessible HDMI input if wall-mounted

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	Price ($)	PERFORMANCE Overall score (%)	Broadcast picture quality score (%)
LG 32CS460	499	72	78
LG 32LM6200	899	70	74
Sony KDL-32HX750	1099	70	71
Samsung LA32E420E2M	439	67	61
TCL L32F3300	499	67	74
LG 32LS5700	699	65	69
Samsung UA32EH4000M	550	65	67
Samsung UA32ES6200M	940	63	65

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2012. All TVs on test DVR, EPG and 3D scores are not included in the overall score. **Weight** (kg) includes

When it comes to energy, the most important factor is the actual energy used, which is calculated based on 10 hours' use per day over 365 days

70%
LG 32LM6200

Good points
- Good remote control
- Good Blu-ray, game, HD playback and photo viewing
- Good viewing angle
- 3D-capable
- Four HDMI inputs readily accessible from the front
- Can record to a USB HDD

Bad points
- Poor access to popular inputs
- No headphone output
- Browser doesn't support Flash video

70%
Sony KDL-32HX750

Good points
- Very good DVD viewing
- Good HD playback and Blu-ray viewing
- 3D-capable
- Four HDMI inputs
- Wi-Fi

Bad points
- No previous button on remote
- Borderline access to popular inputs
- 3D glasses not supplied
- Borderline viewing angle and sound (sounds harsh)
- Browser doesn't support Flash video

IMAGE: ISTOCK PHOTO

WHERE ARE THE PANASONICS AND TOSHIBAS?

We try to cover as many models from major brands as possible. Unfortunately, there's limited space in our labs and sometimes buying new products from retail outlets can mean it takes longer than we'd like to get some TVs tested. We'll be testing some more models in this size in our next batch and updating our online report by the end of October to include the Panasonics and Toshibas – see **choice.com.au/TVs**. ■

									FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS							
quality score (%)	Blu-ray picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	DVR score (%)	EPG score (%)	3D score (%)	DLNA	Swivel screen	Backlighting type	Screen resolution (pixels)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	USB	HDMI input accessible when wall-mounted	Annual energy use (kWh)	Contact
0	74	70	66	70	80	na	80	na		✓	FL	1366 x 768	57 x 79.5 x 21	9	1	0	304	lge.com.au
5	73	60	69	80	70	53	80	80	✓	✓	LED	1920 x 1080	53 x 74.5 x 20.5	9.8	3	4	180	lge.com.au
3	71	53	63	80	50	na	80	70	✓	✓	LED	1920 x 1080	51.5 x 75.5 x 22	10.2	2	2	204	sony.com.au
	73	63	59	80	50	na	80	na			CCFL	1366 x 768	55 x 78.5 x 18.5	8.7	1	0	202	samsung.com.au
	73	43	53	80	50	35	70	na			LED	1366 x 768	49 x 73.5 x 18.5	8.2	1	3	170	tclelectronics.com.au
6	60	65	69	80	70	53	80	na	✓	✓	LED	1920 x 1080	53 x 74.5 x 20.5	9.7	3	4	180	lge.com.au
6	70	59	59	90	40	na	80	na	✓		LED	1366 x 768	50 x 74 x 19.5	6.3	1	0	122	samsung.com.au
5	74	69	61	80	40	53	80	80	✓	✓	LED	1920 x 1080	51.5 x 74 x 25	7.7	3	1	168	samsung.com.au

re LCD screens. **Scores** The overall score is made up of broadcast TV (25%), DVD (20%), Blu-ray (15%), ease of use (20%), sound (10%), energy (5%) and viewing angle (5%).
he stand. **TABLE NOTES na** Not applicable.

Cool living

Buying the wrong-sized air conditioner can prove costly, says **Chris Barnes**

What to look for

- **Energy efficiency** The more stars, the lower the running costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Note that star ratings are different for heating and cooling.
- **Noise** Most local councils have noise restrictions relating to the use of air conditioners. Check these before buying, especially if it needs to be installed close to a neighbour's house.
- **Fan speeds** Look for a model with a wide airflow range – gentle at low speeds and powerful at high speeds – and several fan speeds.
- **Filters** should be easy to access and remove. Cleaning these regularly helps the unit run more effectively. All models on test have

With some states' electricity prices expected to rise by up to 20%, it's more important than ever to make sure your appliances are as efficient as possible. Cooling and heating accounts for 38% of an average household's energy usage; adding hundreds, even thousands, of dollars to your annual bill.

The first step to cutting costs is to make sure your home is thermally efficient. Insulation is a key factor, as is use of shading (shade trees and window awnings) and window coverings such as blinds and curtains. Seal any gaps that let in the outside air. Ceiling or pedestal fans are also good options and cost less to run than air conditioners.

It's vital to match the capacity of the air conditioner to the size of the room. This is a complex calculation involving factors such as whether the room is a living area or bedroom; wall and ceiling insulation; the facing of the windows; and whether adjoining rooms are also air conditioned – use our free calculator at **choice.com.au/coolingcalculator**. Air conditioner suppliers and installers should also be able to help with this.

Nutshell

- Plan your next air conditioner purchase very carefully – size does matter.
- Also consider passive thermal design; it makes your home cool in summer and warm in winter.

About the rest

The **Daikin**, **Mitsubishi Electric**, **LG** and **Toshiba** on test are good overall performers and worth considering. The Daikin and LG have comparatively powerful low fan speeds, while the Toshiba has a comparatively weak high fan speed, giving these models a more limited airflow range. The LG and Toshiba are also less easy to use.

The remaining models are OK overall but less efficient at cooling and heating, and in most cases also have limited airflow ranges.

We weren't able to include a Fujitsu or Panasonic as their new ranges were released in September/October, too late for our test. ■

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	COSTS		PERFORMANCE	
	Price ($)	Annual running cost ($)	Overall score (%)	Cooling efficiency score (%)
Hitachi RAS-70YHA3	1677	396	84	8
Daikin FTXS71LVMA/ RXS71LVMA	2051	411	76	8
Mitsubishi Electric MSZGE80KIT	2571	447	74	7
LG D24AWN-11/ R24AWN-11	1458	432	73	8
Toshiba RAS-24SKV2-A/ RAS-24SAV2-A	1975	452	73	7
Mitsubishi Heavy Industries SRK71ZK-S	1804	492	69	6
Kelvinator KSV70HRC	1348	481	64	6
Lennox LNIV7610	1803	470	63	6
Midea MSC-28HRDN1-QC6GW	1502	471	63	6
Teco TWSTS072HVAMJBB	1565	471	63	6

USING THE TABLE Price The price we paid in July 2012. Supplier prices can va
efficiency; a model scoring 80% has excellent efficiency, 70% is good and 50% is
inverter models (most of the time they'll run at lower than maximum capacity). Th
year when running at its measured maximum capacity, with the remainder of the
NOTES * Lowest fan setting ** Number of speeds that can be set via the remot

mesh filters that are easy to access and remove. They also have purifying filters that are fiddly to remove and replace for the Kelvinator, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Toshiba, and very fiddly for the LG.

- **Operating modes**
  Auto chooses the mode required to keep the room at the chosen temperature.
  Cool pumps heat from the inside to the outside.
  Heat pumps heat from the outside to the inside.
  Dry dehumidifies the air, while cooling only slightly.
  Fan only blows air without heating, cooling or drying. This can be useful when all you want is a cooling breeze.
- **Remote control** Look for large, well-spaced buttons and a big, easy-to-read LCD screen.
- **Airflow control** Some models have settings with reduced and/or extra-high airflow.
- **Sleep mode** adjusts the temperature to a comfortable level for sleeping so the unit doesn't work as hard (and is quieter) when you're sleeping.
- **Adjustable or oscillating louvres** allow air to be distributed more evenly. Point them up for cool air and down for warm; this can be done via the remote for all models on test. Left and right adjustability helps direct air where it's needed.
- **Restart delay** is a protective feature that prevents the air conditioner from starting up again too soon after being switched off.

WHAT TO BUY

84%
Hitachi RAS-70YHA3

Good points
- Very good cooling efficiency
- Excellent heating efficiency
- Good range of airflow

Bad points
- Lower reliability score than most other tested brands in our reliability survey
- Comparatively high standby power consumption (10W/h)

To find out how we test air cons, go to **choice.com.au/largeairconditioners**. You can also find our cooling calculator and advice on air conditioning alternatives.

				CAPACITY (kW)				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS			
Heating efficiency score (%)	Airflow score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise indoor* / outdoor	Measured cooling	Rated cooling	Measured heating (at 2°C outdoor temperature)	Rated heating (at 7°C outdoor temperature)	Fast operation	Quiet operation	Fan-only mode	Sleep mode	Number of fan speeds**	Dimensions indoor unit (cm, H x W x D, measured)	Dimensions outdoor unit (cm, H x W x D, stated)	Contact
0	74	69	Much quieter / noisier	6.6	7.0	5.0	8.3		✓	✓	✓ (A)	3	33.5 x 115 x 24.5	80 x 85 x 30	hitachiaircon.com.au
6	63	70	Medium / quieter	7.2	7.1	8.1	8.0	✓	✓	✓		5	34.5 x 105 x 24.5	77 x 90 x 32	daikin.com.au
4	79	73	Much quieter / quieter	8.0	7.8	8.9	9.0	✓	✓			5	33 x 109 x 24	88 x 84 x 33	mitsubishielectric.com.au
2	64	65	Noisier / medium	6.9	7.1	6.7	8.0	✓		✓	✓	3	35 x 120.5 x 22.5	87 x 80 x 32	lge.com.au
2	69	64	Quieter / quieter	6.7	7.1	7.2	8.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	32 x 105 x 23	89 x 90 x 32	toshiba-aircon.com.au
4	83	68	Much quieter / medium	7.5	7.1	7.5	8.0	✓		✓	✓	4	32 x 109.5 x 25.5	75 x 88 x 34	mhiaa.com.au
4	68	69	Medium / quieter	7.0	7.0	7.8	7.6	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	34 x 119.5 x 25.5	79 x 92 x 37	kelvinator.com.au
3	55	65	Noisier / medium	6.6	7.6	5.0	7.8	✓		✓	✓	3	32.5 x 125 x 25.5	86 x 90 x 31.5	lennoxaus.com.au
6	50	66	Noisier / medium	6.8	7.6	5.4	7.8	✓		✓	✓	3	32.5 x 125 x 25	86 x 90 x 31.5	mideaair.com.au
6	49	61	Noisier / noisier	6.8	7.2	5.4	7.5	✓		✓	✓	3	32.5 x 125 x 25	86 x 90 x 35.5	teco.com.au

considerably. **Scores** The overall score is made up of cooling efficiency (35%), heating efficiency (35%), airflow (20%) and ease of use (10%). The efficiency scores are comparative ratings rather than the actual electrical borderline. **Measured capacity** Reverse-cycle air conditioners are sold with rated heating and cooling capacities. We test them at their maximum thermostat and fan settings, which is a worst-case efficiency scenario for highest capacity we measured in our test is shown in the table. **Annual running costs** We calculate how much each model costs to deliver 1500kWh of full cooling, 1500kWh of partial cooling and 3000kWh of heating per year in standby mode (based on electricity costs of 22c/kWh). Standby costs add only a few dollars a year, but it may still be a good idea to unplug your air conditioner (if possible) when it's not in use for long periods. **TABLE A)** Does not have automatic temperature adjustment.

Unattached and happy

Food processors are handy, but do you really need all the bells and whistles? **Sam Butler** outlines which models will best suit your needs

Food processors are useful for carrying out multiple cooking tasks such as chopping, slicing, shredding, whisking, kneading, blending and mixing. In general, the attachments supplied with the food processor are sufficient for carrying out all these functions. The most useful food processor is one that is compact for easy storage, has non-slip feet that keep the machine stable while in use and comes with a storage compartment or box for all the supplied accessories.

Food processors are best used for the preparation of large quantities of food. Rather than taking one out of storage and setting it up just to chop one onion – especially if the processor weighs just short of nine kilograms (see table, right) – use it to chop up a few more and freeze them to cook and eat later.

Don't get too attached

Some food processors will include a blender attachment, citrus press or juice extractor, all of which take up precious cupboard space.

Nutshell

- Less can be more when it comes to food processors and their accessories.
- A compact food processor may be all you need – at a fraction of the cost of some full-sized models.

Think about how often you'll use these attachments before buying a machine that has them all. In most cases all you'll need is a medium-sized model with a grating and slicing blade and whisk, as well as a small processor attachment for tasks such as grinding nuts and making curry pastes. The smaller the model, the easier it is to take out, use and then store away – although you may want to display one of the larger models permanently on the benchtop as a stylish kitchen feature.

But if you're mostly making liquids, soups and smoothies, a handheld stick blender should be all you need.

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	Price ($)
LARGE FOOD PROCESSORS	
• **Cuisinart** FP-14DCA Elite 14 Cup Food Processor	64
• **Russell Hobbs** RHMP750 Multi Processor	18
• **Breville** The Kitchen Wizz BFP400	15
• **Magimix** 4200XL Red	79
• **Tefal** Chef Pro Food Processor DO660	28
• **Sunbeam** MultiProcessor (1) LC6250	12
Breville Ikon Kitchen Wizz Food Processor BFP650	30
Sunbeam Oskar Professional LC7600S	29
• **Kenwood** Multipro Food Processor FP920	29
Sunbeam Café Series Food Processor LC8900	39
• **Breville** The Kitchen Wizz Pro BFP800	50
• **Kambrook** Dual Food Processor Blender KFP100	12
COMPACT FOOD PROCESSORS	
• **Philips** Viva Collection Food Processor HR7762/90	13
• **Kenwood** Food Processor FP190	10
• **Kenwood** Multipro Compact Food Processor FP250	22
Sunbeam Oskar Mini LC3200	10

USING THE TABLE All food processors on test come with a pulse functio so scores are not comparable with previous tests. **TABLE NOTES** * Used and lid are not dishwasher-safe. **(E)** Blender is not dishwasher-safe.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

An **internal storage drawer** or **separate storage box** keeps all the attachments and blades together – a good way to protect the blades and your safety. However, most of the units on test can't accommodate all the accessories, which is frustrating. The size of the **blender jug** and **food processor bowl** varies from model to model, so think about what you'll be using it for and the amount you need to process/blend. Most processors come with a bowl with 1-3L capacity. A **mini processor bowl** that sits inside the main food processor bowl is great for processing small quantities, making pesto and mayonnaise and grinding nuts. **Rubber/suction feet** on the motor unit can help keep it stable.

Cord storage helps when storing the food processor and keeping your benchtop or cupboard tidy. A **double feed chute** is a standard chute with a smaller chute insert that allows for smaller or thinner foods to be guided into the food processor to give better control when slicing or shredding. A **chipping blade** is useful for making chips or vegetable strips. A **reversible blade** has a grating blade on one side and a slicing blade on the other, cutting down the number of separate blades you need to store. A **separate grinder unit** can be good for grinding small loads, such coffee, herbs and spices. A **beater** or **whisk disc** attachment is specifically for whipping cream and beating egg whites.

A number of models come with a **citrus juicer**, while others come with a **press juice extractor** for juicing other types of fruit and vegetables.

PERFORMANCE			FEATURES																SPECIFICATIONS				
Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cord storage	Blade / attachment storage	Double feed chute	Dishwasher-safe accessories	Dough blade	Fine slicing blade	Coarse slicing blade	Fine grating blade*	Fine shredding	Chipping blade	Whisk	Blender attachment	Citrus press	Centrifugal juicer	Wattage (W)	Weight (kg)	Maximum bowl capacity (mL)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact
94	94	70		✓	✓	✓ (A)	✓	✓	✓		✓							1400	8.4	2600	44 x 21 x 28	cuisinart.com.au
94	90	75	✓		✓	✓ (A)	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓				750	3.2	2000	41 x 20 x 24	russellhobbs.com.au
93	91	70	✓		✓	✓ (A), (B)	✓	✓				✓	✓					800	3.4	2000	41 x 21 x 26	breville.com.au
92	92	67	✓	✓	✓	✓ (C)	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓					950	8.3	1300	44 x 21 x 27	cambur.com.au
90	88	67	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1000	3.2	1500	43 x 25 x 27	groupeseb.com
89	87	68	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					850	3.8	1750	33 x 37 x 22	sunbeam.com.au
89	85	70	✓	✓	✓	✓ (A), (D)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							1000	7.6	2000	43 x 20 x 24	breville.com.au
89	81	77	✓	✓	✓	✓ (A)		✓	✓	✓	✓							1100	7.2	2000	44 x 23 x 30	sunbeam.com.au
88	86	67	✓		✓	✓ (A)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1000	4.1	1500	39 x 21 x 24	kenwood-australia.com
88	83	70	✓	✓	✓	✓ (A)		✓	✓	✓	✓							1400	8.9	2000	45 x 23 x 30	sunbeam.com.au
87	74	70	✓	✓	✓	✓ (A)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					2000	8.9	2500	46 x 22 x 27	breville.com.au
87	69	63		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				850	4.3	1500	32 x 41 x 18	kambrook.com.au
84	91	73	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				750	2.1	1200	36 x 19 x 22	philips.com.au
83	90	73	✓			✓ (A), (C), (E)			✓				✓	✓	✓			600	2.1	800	28 x 33 x 18	kenwood-australia.com
81	86	73	✓			✓ (A) (C)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			750	2.5	1000	37 x 24 x 21	kenwood-australia.com
81	84	77	✓	✓		✓ (A)			✓	✓		✓						600	1.8	500	37 x 17 x 19	sunbeam.com.au

and processing and coarse shredding blades. **Price** Recommended retail, as of July 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). Our testing method has changed or zesting, or grating parmesan cheese. • Newly tested model. **(A)** On the top rack only. **(B)** Bowl, blade and disc not dishwasher-safe. **(C)** Select minimum temperature and avoid the drying cycle. **(D)** Bowl

WHAT TO BUY

LARGE FOOD PROCESSORS

84%
Cuisinart FP-14DCA Elite 14 Cup Food Processor

Good points
- Separate storage for all attachments
- Controls are very easy to use
- Accessories are dishwasher-safe on top shelf
- Adjustable slicing blade with six thicknesses
- Includes large, medium and small processing bowls
- Motor unit stays very stable on the bench during operation
- On indicator light

Bad points
- Pusher and blade attachments can be difficult to clean
- Large bulky unit and attachments, difficult to store
- Relatively expensive
- No cord storage

84%
Russell Hobbs RHMP750 Multi Processor

Good points
- Controls are very easy to use
- Excellent for blending soup in blender attachment
- Two speeds
- Includes a mill and mini bowl attachment
- Comprehensive instructions with recipes
- Dishwasher-safe on top shelf

Bad points
- Very noisy during processing
- No separate storage for attachments

83%
Breville The Kitchen Wizz BFP400

Good points
- Controls are easy to use
- Comparatively few attachments
- Comprehensive instructions with recipes
- Comparatively inexpensive
- Two speeds
- Very stable on bench during operation

Bad points
- Locking lid onto bowl requires a little effort
- No separate storage for all attachments
- Noisy during processing
- Hand access to some blades is possible through chute
- Bowl, blades and discs are not dishwasher-safe

Look out for our next issue in which combination food processor, benchtop mixer and cooking appliances – including the Thermomix – go head to head

Cleaning tips

To **remove stains** on the processor bowl left by vegetables such as carrots, rub oil onto the surface and then wash it as normal. If you have to shred cheese (or other high-fat foods) as well, do the carrot first – we found the cheese removes the stains.

To **remove the odour** from strong-smelling foods such as onions, one manufacturer recommends soaking the bowl or jug in a small amount of bleach and water (two litres of water to 100mL of bleach) for five minutes, and then washing as normal.

ABOUT THE REST

LARGE FOOD PROCESSORS

The **Tefal** is a very good performer overall and worth considering, although its bowl and lid can be tricky to lock into position and it doesn't have storage for the blades and attachments.

The **Sunbeam Multi Processor LC6250** and **Kenwood Multipro Food Processor FP920** are good performers overall. The Sunbeam

COMPACT FOOD PROCESSORS

82%
Magimix 4200XL Red

Good points
- Controls are easy to use
- Storage box for all accessories
- Includes large, medium and small processing bowls
- Comprehensive instructions with recipes
- Motor unit stays very stable on the bench during operation
- Dishwasher-safe at low temperature

Bad points
- Hand access to some blades is possible through smaller chute
- Most expensive model on test
- Large bulky unit and attachments are difficult to store
- Comparatively heavy
- One speed only
- Only OK for ease of cleaning

84%
Philips Viva Collection Food Processor HR7762/90

Good points
- Excellent for blending soup in blender attachment
- Compact unit is easy to store, with storage tray for all attachments
- Smaller parts easy to clean
- Controls are easy to use
- Relatively lightweight but stays fairly stable on the bench during operation
- Two speeds
- Relatively inexpensive
- Comprehensive instructions
- Dishwasher-safe
- Includes mill attachment

Bad points
- No double feed chute
- Noisy during processing
- Hand access to some blades is possible through chute

83%
Kenwood Food Processor FP190

Good points
- Excellent for blending soup in blender attachment
- Controls are easy to use
- Two speeds
- Compact unit is easy to store
- Smaller parts are easy to clean
- Dishwasher-safe on top shelf and at low temperatures

Bad points
- Relatively lightweight, not very stable on the bench and can move with a heavy load or when removing bowl
- No double feed chute
- No storage for attachments
- Basic instructions
- Hand access to some blades is possible through chute
- Blender isn't dishwasher safe

IMAGES: ISTOCKPHOTO

has five speeds but is not very stable on the bench and can move with a heavy load or when you're removing the bowl. Also, its accessories aren't dishwasher-safe. The FP920 may move with a heavy load or when you're removing the bowl/blender as its non-slip feet do not hold the unit in position.

The **Breville The Kitchen Wizz Pro BFP800** is also a good performer overall. However, Breville will void the warranty on this appliance if you shred cheese in it – a popular function that can be performed in all the other food processors on test.

The **Kambrook** has three speeds and separate storage for accessories but isn't dishwasher safe. It's only OK overall and for ease of use and performance, and its blades are positioned too high to properly emulsify mayonnaise.

COMPACT FOOD PROCESSORS

The **Kenwood Multipro Compact Food Processor FP250** is very good overall but comparatively expensive. It's not very stable on the bench and can move with a heavy load or when removing the bowl. It also has no double feed chute or storage for attachments, and hand access to some blades is possible through the chute, meaning your fingers are at risk. ■

Their time to shine

LEDs are ready to challenge CFLs, but for now they're still relatively expensive, says **Chris Barnes**

Our current batch of lamps has now been on test for 1000 hours – equivalent to seven months at five hours usage per day – and already the best and worst performers are becoming apparent.

LED lamps are increasingly appearing in a range of wattages, though they're mostly available in the lower-wattage range of up to about 8W, roughly equivalent to a 40W incandescent lamp. Most lamps, whether CFL or LED, are now also labelled with their light output in lumens (lm). As a rough guide to what to expect from different lumen values:

420 lm = 40W incandescent
720 lm = 60W incandescent
930 lm = 75W incandescent
1300 lm = 100W incandescent

We've also kept the Philips Master LEDbulb 12W running from our last test. And 8000 hours later, its brightness is still as good as when we started testing it, with none of its 10 samples failing; its claimed 25000-hour lifespan looks realistic so far.

What to look for

Colour temperature basically means different types of light. It's measured in kelvins and indicated on the lamp and its packaging. *Warm white (3000K)* – yellowish light, similar to that from an incandescent lamp. All lamps on test are warm white. *Cool white (4000K)* – white light, similar to that from fluorescent tubes, and suitable for offices, kitchens and bathrooms. *Daylight (5000K or more)* – blue-white light equivalent to outdoor daylight.

The **shape** of a lamp isn't necessarily a factor in its brightness, though spiral CFLs tend to put out more light than folded tube CFLs.

Dimmable Many CFLs and LEDs are suitable for use with dimmer switches, but check the packaging to make sure you have the right type.

WHAT TO BUY

Low wattage
(7-8W, or 35-45W equivalent)

84%
BYD 6.9W LED Globe

Medium wattage
(10-12W, or 50-70W equivalent)

76%
Verbatim 10W LED Classic A Superior

High wattage
(18-20W, or 75-100W equivalent)

84%
Envirolux 20W ES CFL 2700K

ABOUT THE REST

The rest don't have as good luminosity as the recommended models, though any with scores of 70% or more are still worth considering. Most have had none of their 10 samples fail so far, except the CLA (three failures) and Mirabella (one). For the full results table, log on to choice.com.au/lamps.

Low wattage (7-8W, or 35-45W equivalent)

- **Osram LED Parathom Classic A 40** (76%, $22)
- **Crompton Lighting XL-LED Performance XL-7.5ES27** (70%, $50)
- **Prisma LED PRI-HO-7W E27 WW** (66%, $43)

Medium wattage (10-12W, or 50-70W equivalent)

- **Sylvania LED A60 GLS** (68%, $100)
- **CLA Longlife Dimmable LED Lamp 12W** (56%, $80)

High wattage (18-20W, or 75-100W equivalent, all CFLs)

- **Osram Dulux Superstar Micro Twist 18W** (78%, $5.90)
- **Sylvania Mini-Lynx twister 20W B22** (78%, $7.15)
- **Sparsam Low Energy Bulb 001.314.16 20W** (70%, $13)
- **Philips Genie 18W WW E27** (70%, $5.50)
- **Mirabella Energy Saver Petite 18W** (64%, $5)
- **Nelson Aladdin Mini 20W** (62% $6.30)

Nutshell

- Our latest landline phone test assesses the call sound quality for both the caller and receiver.
- The ability to make calls during a power failure is increasingly common on cordless phones.

Do you hear what I hear?

Sound quality should be the top priority for your home phone, says **Denis Gallagher**

While it seems every man, woman and child now has a smartphone, many of us still reach for the landline as soon as we step into our homes.

Each phone on test is assessed for sound quality when listening to a phone call on the tested handset (receiving sound quality) as well for how the phone would sound to a person on the other end of the line listening on a good-quality corded telephone (sending sound quality).

The capacity to make calls during a power outage is now more common, with two models on test having this feature. And the Uniden XDECT 6135BTU +1, Elite 9135 +1 and Panasonic KX-TG7652AZB are all able to link with a mobile phone via Bluetooth, allowing a cordless handset to accept calls made to a mobile phone number. While these features can be useful, sound quality, network range and battery life should still be at the top of your priority list when you next buy a phone. ▸

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

81% Uniden XDECT R055 +1 $230
80% Siemens Gigaset A400 A Duo $119
79% Uniden DECT 3035 +1 $100
(All in *CHOICE*, Feb '12)

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Support for Bluetooth mobiles Four phones have this feature, and three also allow you to add your mobile phone to your home phone as if it were an additional handset. The Siemens Gigaset SL910A has Bluetooth, but for the support of wireless headsets only, with no direct link to a mobile phone.

Night mode You can set the phone not to ring during a specified time period – very handy for a good night's sleep.

Incoming/outgoing barring provides a level of control in case you don't want to accept calls from certain companies or individuals, as well as preventing members of the household from calling specific numbers without permission.

Hearing-aid compatible (Tele-Coil or T-Coil) support allows the caller's voice to be directly fed from the phone to your hearing aid, helping to filter out background noise when listening through the handset speaker. Only the Uniden models have a T-Coil, which includes appropriate acoustic coupling measures incorporated into the phone's design.

Handsets supported The number in the table (page 66) shows how many extra handsets of the same model can be purchased and used. Some models only support multiple handsets at point of sale. For example, you can buy the Uniden 1515 with several handsets, however you can't purchase the Uniden 1515 +1 and add another handset later.

Phone book allows you to store your favourite contact numbers and dial the number by selecting the contact. Some phones on test also have a speed-dial feature for up to 10 numbers.

Batteries While all cordless phones should come with rechargeable batteries, some models can use other AAA NiMH rechargeable batteries, which are less expensive and more readily available.

Digital system "DECT 6.0" and "ECO DECT" are marketing terms for a virtually identical technology, namely DECT 1.8 – operating within the 1.8-1.9GHz band, a frequency range reserved for cordless phones. All phones on test use DECT.

WHAT TO BUY

79%
Panasonic KX-TG8032ALB

Good points

- Repeater included, extending range
- Incoming and outgoing call barring
- Excellent standby battery life
- Good speakerphone sound quality
- Allows you to make a call in a blackout

Bad points

- Only 11 hours of talk battery time
- Handset is required to be in base station for power-outage feature to work

79%
Siemens Gigaset A510A Duo

Good points

- Very good ease of use
- Very good talk time battery life
- Excellent standby battery life

Bad points

- No message count display on base station

79%
Uniden XDECT 8055 +1

Good points

- Repeater included, extending range
- Up to 10 extra handsets supported
- Good sound quality for the answering machine
- Excellent standby battery life
- Highest (hands-free) speaker volume

Bad points

- Receiving sound quality not as good as for other top-performing models

		PERFORMANCE											FEATURES								
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Sound quality – incoming score (%)	Sound quality – outgoing score (%)	Range score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Battery life score (%)	Answering machine score (%)	Talk time (h : min)	Standby time (days)	Range (m)	Colour display (LCD)	GAP compatible*	Headset port	Bluetooth support	Night mode	Call barring (incoming)	Call barring (outgoing)	Hearing-aid compatible
Uniden XDECT R055 +1	230	81	70	73	87	81	88	80	18:00	10	170			✓		✓	✓		✓
Siemens Gigaset A400 A Duo	119	80	73	73	77	83	99	80	23:30	10	140		✓			✓			
• **Panasonic** KX-TG8032ALB	180	79	77	80	88	73	73	73	11:00	10	150	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓(B)	
• **Siemens** Gigaset A510A Duo	159	79	68	75	80	80	91	71	19:30	10	100		✓			✓			
Uniden DECT 3035 +1	100	79	63	77	92	73	85	80	17:00	10	200					✓			✓
• **Uniden** XDECT 8055 +1	160	79	60	83	87	75	85	78	17:00	10	150			✓		✓	✓		✓
• **Panasonic** KX-TG7652AZB	170	78	65	83	77	76	90	73	19:00	10	100				✓	✓	✓		
Uniden ELITE 9135 +1 White	160	78	60	73	87	79	83	84	16:00	10	190			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Panasonic KX-TG6461ALT	150	77	70	80	73	84	81	81	19:30	8	90						✓		
• **Panasonic** KX-TG6722ALB	100	77	68	87	78	72	78	71	16:00	9	100		✓			✓	✓	✓(B)	
• **Uniden** DECT 1515 +1	55	73	57	82	80	74	68	na	13:30	8	100								✓
• **Oricom** M600-2	100	72	67	72	70	76	75	71	24:00	5	75		✓						
• **Uniden** XDECT 6135BTU +1	160	71	72	80	70	72	58	76	13:30	6	75			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
• **Siemens** Gigaset SL910A plus SL910H	399	69	73	77	67	75	52	76	8:00	7	75	✓	✓	✓(A)	✓				

78%
Panasonic KX-TG7652AZB

Good points
- Repeater included, extending range
- Bluetooth support allows handset to take mobile phone calls
- Excellent standby battery life
- Good speakerphone sound quality
- Allows you to make a call in a blackout

Bad points
- Receiving sound quality not as good as other top-performing models

77%
Panasonic KX-TG6722ALB

Good points
- Incoming and outgoing call barring
- Good ease of use for the answering machine
- Allows you to make a call in a blackout

Bad points
- Receiving sound quality not as good as other top-performing models

ABOUT THE REST

The **Uniden 1515 +1** has a very good range and can deliver good volume levels for ringtone, speaker handset and earpiece. However, it has no answering machine and our panel found the sound quality when using the handset is not as good as for the other models on test.

While the **Oricom M600-2** performs OK, it's worth spending a few dollars more to buy one of the entry level models from Uniden, Panasonic or Siemens.

Many of the **Siemens Gigaset SL910A's** features may appeal to mobile phone owners, including capacitive touchscreen, the ability to sync contacts from Outlook, and Bluetooth support for a headset. But it's the most expensive single phone (there is no additional handset) we've ever tested, and we found the battery life and overall range to be among the worst on test. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

combination	Able to operate in power outage	Wall-mountable	Additional handsets supported	Power consumption (W, base only)**	Power consumption (W, base and phone)**	Handset ringer loudness (dB)**	Maximum volume for handset speaker (dB)**	Maximum earpiece volume (dB)**	Base ringer maximum volume (dB)**	Charging time (h)**	Total phonebook entries	Total ringtones	Polyphonic ringtones	Battery type (NiMH)	Answering machine recording time (min)	Contact
		✓	4	0.74	1.32	72	67	76	75	15	100	7	5	Pack	15	uniden.com.au
		✓	2	0.29	0.4	62	70	73	72	6	80	20	13	2 x AAA	25	gigaset.com/au
	✓	✓	4	0.48	0.52	69	75	68	72	7	200	70	30	2 x AAA	18	panasonic.com.au
			2	0.31	0.41	73	67	66	74	6	150	35	15	2 x AAA	25	gigaset.com/au
		✓	4	1.23	1.64	71	68	77	76	15	100	7	5	Pack	16	uniden.com.au
		✓	10	1.14	1.58	67	78	68	78	15	100	13	4	Pack	12	uniden.com.au
		✓	4	0.9	0.92	69	75	68	74	7	3050	10	5	2 x AAA	18	panasonic.com.au
			4	0.63	1.07	74	66	74	73	15	200 (D)	10	6	Pack	16	uniden.com.au
	✓	✓	5	0	0.81	68	70	73	72	7	100	15	10	2 x AAA	20	panasonic.com.au
	✓	✓	4	0.41	0.45	70	68	69	76	7	100	70	30	2 x AAA	30	panasonic.com.au
		✓	0	1.38	1.89	71	71	72	na	15	70	12	4	Pack	na	uniden.com.au
			3	0.6	0.71	77	78	67	71	16	50	14	5	2 x AAA	15	oricom.com.au
		✓	8	0.8	1.12	73	69	68	79	15	200 (E)	16	6	Pack	16	uniden.com.au
		✓ (C)	5	0.94	0.9	69	74	66	78	5	500	31	7	Pack (F)	55	gigaset.com/au

USING THE TABLE All models are tested with an extra handset, as multi-handset phones are found in many homes. Models that were only available as a single handset were tested using an additional handset of the same model or brand. Answering machine performance is scored but not included in the overall score, to allow direct comparison with landline phones without an answering machine. **Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of sound quality – incoming calls (17.5%), sound quality – outgoing calls (17.5%), range (30%), ease of use (20%) and battery life (15%). Charging times are rounded to the nearest 30 minutes. **na** Not applicable – has no answering machine. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested model. * Additional handsets from other manufacturers are supported. ** Measured. **(A)** USB connection. **(B)** Up to six numbers can be barred. If you enter an area code then that entire area is barred. You can assign restrictions to particular handsets. **(C)** Base station is wall-mountable, but separate docking station is not. **(D)** Additionally, phonebooks from up to four paired mobile phones can be downloaded to the phone. Each downloaded phonebook can have up to 1500 entries. **(E)** Home phonebook, up to four mobile phonebooks of up to 1500 entries each can be downloaded, phonebooks remain separate. **(F)** Lithium-ion battery used.

WHAT TO BUY

$22

85%

Sanyo Eneloop

Good points

- Pre-charged, ready to use out of the pack
- Continues to operate well after the 200-cycle period
- Voltage level close to 1.2V at the end of the test cycle

Bad points

- None to mention

It's not easy being green

Rechargeable batteries are an environmentally friendly power option, but not all are created equal. **Denis Gallagher** sorts the best from the worst

Cost-wise, rechargeable batteries are a smarter buy than alkaline for powering your devices, and you'll also help reduce the number of dead batteries going into landfill. However, rechargeable batteries are better suited to some situations than others.

CHOICE put 13 rechargeable nickel-metal hydride (NiMH) AA batteries to the test to see which last longest, can be recharged most often and lose the least amount of charge when not in use. We also noted the voltage level just before the end of their life cycle to see which perform at their best over the life of the battery.

Self-discharging (when battery capacity drops while waiting to be used) remains an issue with some rechargeable batteries, particularly with infrequently used devices, such as torches, or those used for short bursts over long periods of time, such as remote controls.

We also tested two non-rechargeable lithium batteries (Duracell Ultra Lithium and Eveready Lithium) for use in high-drain devices. These aren't listed in the table (right), but were used for comparison only. The Duracell delivers the highest initial capacity, but also releases the most amount of capacity when not in use. The Eveready delivers the best combination of performance and consistent capacity when not in use.

Low self-discharge (LSD) models ensure your infrequently used devices will work when they have to. Batteries with a high self-discharge score in the table are more likely to deliver the power you need when you decide to use your device.

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	COSTS		PERFORMAN
	Price for pack of 4 ($)	Price per battery ($)	Overall score (%)
Sanyo Eneloop (white)	22	5.50	85
Sanyo Eneloop (coloured)	39 (A)	4.88	83
Dick Smith S3153	20	5.00	81
Powerex 2700mAh	21	5.25	70
Powertech SB-1737	15	3.75	68
Duracell Rechargeable	22.50	5.63	66
Eveready RE15BP4T	17	4.25	65
Sanyo Eneloop (black)	21.50	5.38	65
Energizer NH15BP4T	23.50	5.88	64
Powerex Immedion	19	4.75	64
Coles Recharge+ (DA0711)	14	3.50	57
Activ Energy Rechargeable (Aldi)	7	1.75	55
Vapex Instant	14	3.50	53

USING THE TABLE Price we paid in July 2012. **Scores** The overall score at which the battery fails to reach at least 50% of its initial charge. Note:

83%
Sanyo Eneloop*

Good points
- Pre-charged, ready to use out of the pack
- Continues to operate well after the 200-cycle period
- Voltage level close to 1.2V at the end of the test cycle

Bad points
- None to mention

* Pack of eight

81%
Dick Smith S3153

Good points
- Continues to operate well after 200-cycle period, with second-highest number of charges
- Voltage level close to 1.2V at the end of the test cycle

Bad points
- Needs to be charged for initial use and doesn't keep charge as long as most of the other batteries on test (shorter shelf life between charges)

70%
Powerex 2700mAh Rechargeable

Good points
- Highest initial capacity of all batteries on test
- Average discharge time the longest on test by almost 15 minutes

Bad points
- Only lasts 58 charge/recharge cycles before capacity drops below 1350mAh

			SPECIFICATIONS									
Consistency score (%)	Self-discharge score (%)	Value score (%)	Average discharge time (min)	Failure cycle (charge/discharge)	Voltage at end of test cycle (V)	Measured capacity (mAh)	Claimed capacity (mAh)	Country of origin	Nominal voltage (V)	Ready to use (LSD)	Contact
98	99	69	116	200+	1.19	2018	2000	Japan	1.2	✓	sanyo.com.au
87	99	77	116	200+	1.14	2036	2000	Japan	1.2	✓	sanyo.com.au
81	92	76	119	200+	1.16	2114	2000	China	1.2		dse.com.au
91	95	26	159	58	0.77	2738	2700	Japan	1.2		protog.com.au
67	98	90	108	197	1.05	2018	2000	China	1.2		jaycar.com.au
75	92	35	131	102	1.00	2379	2450	Japan	1.2		duracell.com.au
64	97	71	109	189	1.05	1948	2000	China	1.2		eveready.com
87	96	25	145	62	0.66	2534	2500	Japan	1.2	✓	sanyo.com.au
92	90	29	143	81	0.94	2415	2450	Japan	1.2		energizerbatteries.com.au
60	96	48	130	120	1.08	2427	2400	Taiwan	1.2	✓	protog.com.au
66	91	48	135	86	1.03	2354	2200	China	1.2	✓	coles.com.au
74	98	48	131	45	1.22	2375	2300	China	1.2	✓	aldi.com.au
67	95	40	121	81	1.09	2242	2500	China	1.2	✓	officeworks.com.au

made up of endurance (45%), consistency (25%), self-discharge (20%) and value (10%). **Failure cycle** The charge/discharge cycle cores here cannot be directly compared with previous tests. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Price is for a pack of eight.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Powertech** is a good value option, although it doesn't last as long as the other batteries per charge.

The **Energizer**, **Eveready** and **Duracell** brands perform OK without delivering the high capacity of the **Powerex 2700mAh** or the consistently long life of the top-performing Sanyo batteries.

The **Powerex Immedion** also dropped but lasted 120 cycles and may still provide a useful capacity for general use.

The **Coles** and **Aldi Active Energy LSD** batteries deliver good shelf life, but dropped below half their initial capacity before 100 cycles in our test. ■

Washed away

One washing machine's extreme water use is among the worst we've seen in six years of testing hundreds of models, explains **Matthew Steen**

Australia is a fairly dry country, and many of us put great stock in the water efficiency of our washing machines – which is why we have the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) rating scheme. So when CHOICE discovers a machine that wastes water as prodigiously as the Samsung SW70SP, we're pretty concerned, to say the least.

The Samsung used more than 220L in a wash, even on its automatic water level setting and with a part load. While top loaders tend to use more water due to their design, it's rare to see a machine waste so much when other top loaders perform better using half this amount. In the past six years of our testing, only three machines have used more than 200L for a wash – and in that time we've tested more than 170 washers. We hope never to see another machine that wastes so much again.

Because of this extreme overuse, the Samsung scores 0% for its water efficiency, the lowest score in the table (page 72).

Nutshell

- The Samsung SW70SP used more than 220L of water in a single wash.
- We've split our results into front and top loaders rather than size categories.

For comprehensive information on what to look for when buying a washing machine, go to **choice.com.au/washers**. And check out **choice.com.au/appliancereliability** for results of our latest reliability survey

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Woollens cycle (machine/hand-washable) programs relate to the instructions on the garment itself, advising whether it's machine washable or for handwash only. Washers with a tick for handwash claim this program is gentle enough for handwash-only items.

Out-of-balance correction automatically detects and then redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or taking in more water (which is what most top loaders do). If you're concerned about high water use, opt for a machine without this feature or buy a front loader – these are less likely to go out of balance than top loaders.

Selectable spin speed allows you to change the spin speed on some programs. A higher spin speed will result in drier clothes (good when using a dryer), while a lower speed is for delicates or fabrics that crease easily.

WHAT TO BUY

CHOICE recommends front loaders that score at least 75% overall and 80% for dirt removal. For those who prefer top loaders we recommend those that score at least 65% overall and 70% for dirt removal. For a full profile of other current machines from our table, go to **choice.com.au/washers.**

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TOP LOADER

71%
Haier HWMP55-918 (5.5kg)

Good points
- Very good rinse score
- Favourite program
- Extra rinse

Bad points
- Poor gentleness score
- Borderline for spin score

71%
Simpson SWT801 (8.0kg)

Good points
- Excellent rinse performance
- Favourite program
- Soft-closing lid

Bad points
- Poor gentleness score

69%
Simpson SWT604 (6.0kg)

Good points
- Very good rinse score
- Extra rinse

Bad points
- Borderline gentleness score
- No water auto-sensing or delay start

68%
Samsung SW65V9W (6.5kg)

Good points
- Excellent rinse performance
- Favourite program
- Extra rinse

Bad points
- Poor water efficiency
- Borderline gentleness and spin efficiency
- No gentle/delicates program

Auto-sensing water level optimises water, energy and time by automatically adjusting the water level according to the load or fabric type. Some machines also adjust the washing action.

Extra rinse can be useful for people sensitive to detergents, as this option adds an extra rinse stage to the washing program.

Tap connection If you only have a cold water tap in your laundry, choosing a front loader means you can still wash in warm or hot water when needed, as the machine will heat the water itself. If you want to take advantage of less expensive hot water systems, such as solar, look for a hot and cold water connection machine – be aware that most front loaders with hot and cold connection only draw hot water when the wash temperature is set to 60°C.

Favourite program lets you program your preferred wash option for future use at the touch of a button.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

FRONT LOADER

80% Fisher & Paykel Best Buy
WH60F60W (6.0kg) (May 12) $799

79% Asko
W6884 Eco (7.0kg) (May 12) $1899

79% Miele
W5903 (7.5kg) (May 12) $2399

TOP LOADER

68% Simpson
SWT554 (5.5kg) (May 12) $689

For profiles, how we test and to compare all washing machines on test, go to **choice.com.au/washers**

		COSTS		PERFORMANCE									FEATU
		Price ($)	Running costs ($/10 years)	Overall score (%)	Dirt removal score (%)	Rinse performance score (%)	Gentleness score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Spin efficiency score (%)	Water used (L, normal cycle)	Cycle time (min, normal wash)	Noise (dB)	Woollens cycle (machine /
FRONT LOADERS	**Electrolux** EWF10831	1059	572	80	77	93	73	81	72	54	107	59	✓/-
	Electrolux EWF12821	1219	457	80	78	88	67	87	80	44	89	61	✓/-
	Fisher & Paykel WH60F60W	799	519	80	82	88	69	83	69	51	115	62	✓/-
	Asko W6444	1499	504	79	76	94	70	76	76	63	96	70	✓/-
	Asko W6884 Eco	1899	724	79	80	98	67	60	80	92	137	65	✓/✓
	Hoover VHD8144D	799	437	79	77	87	71	85	74	47	68	69	✓/-
	Miele W1913	1699	383	79	76	88	72	85	72	48	81	64	✓/✓
	Miele W5741	2199	338	79	79	80	72	89	73	39	83	61	✓/✓
	Miele W5903	2399	431	79	81	83	71	90	74	39	82	59	✓/✓
	Bosch WAE22462AU	1049	532	78	74	94	72	75	76	66	91	66	✓/✓
	Electrolux EWF14811	1529	494	78	76	81	69	90	79	39	89	67	✓/-
	• **LG** WD11020D1 (A)	849	552	78	77	88	72	87	78	44	105	59	✓/-
	LG WD14030D6 (A)	1499	626	78	78	92	72	84	69	49	98	63	✓/-
	LG WD14060D6	1899	570	78	78	82	74	90	77	37	87	60	✓/-
	Panasonic NA-140VG3	1449	354	78	77	81	71	86	70	44	85	59	✓/✓
	• **Samsung** WF8750LSW1	899	480	78	78	91	66	83	63	50	126	60	✓/-
	• **LG** WD13020D1 (A)	1099	574	77	77	86	67	85	78	46	104	61	✓/-
	Miele W5835	2799	315	77	76	76	73	90	67	38	83	63	✓/✓
	Whirlpool WFS1055CD	699	627	77	76	95	66	72	67	70	137	61	✓/✓
	• **Whirlpool** WFS1073DD	799	754	77	79	93	68	80	61	55	153	67	✓/✓
	Bosch WAS24460AU	1249	468	76	72	93	72	77	65	61	65	62	✓/✓
	• **Electrolux** EWF1074	899	666	76	78	96	68	78	60	59	123	60	-/-
	• **Bosch** WAE24272AU	949	392	75	68	84	75	84	67	49	51	65	✓/✓
	Bosch WAE20262AU	899	391	75	69	86	76	83	66	51	49	64	✓/✓
	Whirlpool WFS1274CD	899	385	75	74	73	73	89	63	40	101	65	✓/-
	• **Simpson** SWF8556	689	492	74	72	88	75	84	58	48	94	63	-/-
TOP LOADERS	• **Haier** HWMP55-918	429	590	71	79	89	42	70	50	73	99	62	✓/-
	Simpson SWT801	1059	665	71	77	92	45	57	66	98	104	58	✓/-
	• **Fisher & Paykel** WL80T65CW2	1189	683	69	66	96	53	53	75	105	60	57	✓/-
	• **Simpson** SWT604	739	613	69	72	89	47	64	56	84	66	58	✓/-
	Samsung SW65V9W	649	758	68	74	96	51	45	51	119	51	59	✓/-
	Simpson SWT554	689	620	68	70	89	46	63	54	86	65	63	✓/-
	LG WT-H550	749	636	66	65	91	61	53	50	104	55	51	-/-
	• **LG** WT-H800	1049	1086	66	68	89	59	52	47	106	47	55	✓/-
	• **Samsung** SW75V9W	749	793	66	69	97	52	42	53	124	52	62	✓/-
	Whirlpool 6AWTW5700XW0	1269	440	66	66	61	61	78	62	60	46	62	-/-
	Fisher & Paykel MW513	649	843	65	65	96	54	35	68	137	41	62	✓/-
	Fisher & Paykel WA70T60GW1	749	861	65	65	97	53	33	69	141	43	63	✓/-
	• **Simpson** SWT954	1059	937	63	61	97	52	29	66	148	112	65	✓/-
	• **Fisher & Paykel** WA80T65GW1	879	1004	62	60	97	57	19	70	166	46	63	✓/-
	Samsung SW70SP	849	1342	58	62	99	56	0	50	224	63	64	✓/-

SPECIFICATIONS								
Distance correction	Selectable spin speed	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Tap connection	Coldest wash for normal wash (°C)*	Capacity (kg)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact
✓	✓		✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au
✓				C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	6	84 x 60 x 50	fp.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 59	asko.com.au
✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 59	asko.com.au
✓	✓			C only	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 52	andico.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 66	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 62	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓		H & C	30	7.5	85 x 60 x 62	miele.com.au
✓	✓			C only	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 59	boschappliances.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓			H & C	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 55	lg.com.au
✓	✓	✓		H & C	30	8.5	85 x 60 x 64	lge.com.au
✓	✓	✓		H & C	30	10	85 x 60 x 64	lge.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	10	85 x 60 x 63	panasonic.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 60	samsung.com
✓	✓			H & C	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 55	lg.com.au
✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 62	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	5.5	85 x 60 x 47	whirlpool.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	30	7.5	85 x 60 x 62	whirlpool.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 60	boschappliances.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	30	7	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	6.5	85 x 60 x 59	boschappliances.com.au
✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	6.5	85 x 60 x 59	boschappliances.com.au
✓	✓			H & C	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 62	whirlpool.com.au
✓	✓			C only	30	5.5	85 x 60 x 63	simpson.com.au
		✓		H & C	Cold	5.5	90 x 53 x 52	haierappliances.com.au
✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	8	107 x 67 x 68	simpson.com.au
✓	✓			H & C	Cold	8	102 x 65 x 65	fisherpaykel.com
		✓		H & C	Cold	6	102 x 60 x 64	simpson.com.au
	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	6.5	97 x 61 x 66	samsung.com.au
		✓		H & C	Cold	5.5	103 x 58 x 63	simpson.com.au
	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	5.5	94 x 54 x 54	lge.com.au
	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	8	102 x 64 x 67	lg.com.au
	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	7.5	100 x 61 x 66	samsung.com
✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	8	107 x 70 x 69	whirlpool.com.au
✓				H & C	Cold	5.5	102 x 65 x 65	fp.com.au
✓	✓			H & C	Cold	7	105 x 60 x 60	fp.com.au
		✓		H & C	Cold	9.5	108 x 70 x 73	simpson.com.au
	✓			H & C	Cold	8	102 x 65 x 65	fisherpaykel.com
	✓			H & C	Cold	7	106 x 61 x 67	samsung.com.au

Any smarter?

We tested the Fisher & Paykel Aquasmart back in 2007 and found it performed well. However, member feedback suggests many who've bought this machine experience detergent residue left behind due to the small amount of water it uses in the wash. We tested for this (see *CHOICE*, September 2008), made suggestions for how to combat the fault without having to rerun the machine and removed it from our recommended models.

We've since tested its replacement, the Fisher & Paykel WL80T65CW2 Aquasmart 2, including checking whether it leaves residue behind on black clothing from the detergent. Our testing found it doesn't, but this is most probably due to its increased water usage. We don't recommend it this time due to its lower dirt removal score. ■

Since 2006, when CHOICE changed to cold water washing, we have:

- tested more than 170 washers,
- used 27kg of detergent,
- gone through 27,000L of water, and
- washed more than 2050kg of clothes.

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of dirt removal (40%), rinse performance (20%), gentleness (15%), water efficiency (15%) and spin efficiency (10%). **Cold wash penalty** As the majority of Australians now wash in cold water straight from the tap, we have applied a small penalty in our overall score to models that cannot do a proper cold wash (at about 20°C) on the normal cycle. While the higher wash temperature may slightly increase a machine's scores for dirt removal and rinse effectiveness, it also means it's using more energy than it would if it were able to do a true cold wash; our penalty compensates for this. **Dirt removal** More accurate than the human eye, a spectrophotometer is used to measure this – differences of about six per cent are visible. **Features** See What to Look For, page 70, for details. **Top connection** Some machines need both hot and cold water to operate. Others connect to cold water only and may need a special connector or sealing cap for the hot water inlet. A machine with a heater (front loaders only) can be particularly useful if you connect to cold only, as it still gives you the option of a warm or hot wash. But a dual connection front loader connected to solar hot water can be more efficient when doing warm or hot washes. **Dimensions** are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, as stated by the manufacturer. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much it will cost for water and electricity over 10 years if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a normal cycle, based on 22c/kWh of electricity and $1.50 per 1000L for water. Some machines still draw power when the machine is connected to a power source but not being used, so switch off the machine at the power point when not in use. The running costs don't include detergent, which is the largest ongoing cost of running a washing machine. **Price** Recommended or average retail, as of August 2012. **TABLE NOTES * Cold = cold tap water (20°C). • Newly tested models. (A)** Even though this machine has a cold wash, it heats the first rinse water to 30°C, so is penalised for this.

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Index

Air conditioners
portable **Dec/Jan**
reverse cycle **May, Oct**
Antibacterials Nov
Appliance reliability Apr
Aroma marketing Aug
Australian Consumer Law Feb
Auctions, online Mar
AV receivers **Jun**

Babies & children
baby food Dec/Jan
baby monitors **May**
baby thermometers **Aug**
bank accounts **May**
change tables **May**
child car restraints **Mar, Aug**
child safety devices Nov
childcare options Feb
children's bikes Nov
cots **Apr, Sep**
highchairs **Aug**
playpens **Mar**
poppers (kids' juices) Apr
portable cots **Sep**
product marketing Jul
strollers **Apr, Jun, Sep**
toy safety Nov
Baby
food Dec/Jan
monitors **May**
slings & carriers Jul
Banking satisfaction **Dec/Jan**
Barbecues, gas **Dec/Jan**
Barrel/upright vacuum cleaners **Oct**
Bath spa attachment **May**
Batteries (rechargeable) **Oct**
Beer **Sep**
Benchtop ovens **Mar**
Bikes
children's **Nov**
lights **Jul**
locks **Nov**
Blenders & mixers **Jun**
Blu-ray players **Feb, Jul**
Breakfast cereals Oct
Builders, complaints **Mar**

Cake mixes **May**
Call centres **May**
Camcorders **Dec/Jan, Jun**
Cameras **Feb, Aug**
Cancer **Apr**
Carbon offsets **Jul**
Caring for your belongings Oct
Carriers & slings, baby Jul
Car
child restraints **Mar, Aug**
GPS **Nov, May, Sep**
insurance **Mar**
parks (private) **Sep**
reversing cameras **Jul**
safety testing **Dec/Jan**
servicing **Aug**
tyres **Jun**
Ceiling fans **Sep**
CFLs (light bulbs)**Nov, May*, Oct***
Change tables **May**
Child car restraints **Mar, Aug**
Childcare options Feb
Children's
bank accounts May
bikes **Nov**
education funds **Jun**
products, marketing **Jul**
Child safety devices **Nov**
Chiropractors **Aug**
CHOICE
Awards **Apr**
2011 round-up **Dec/Jan**
Cider **Feb**
Clothing
chemicals **Jun**
plus sizes **Apr**
Coconut water **Aug**
Coffee (making) **Apr**
Compression wear **Nov**
Computers, tablet **Mar**
Consumer
Electronics Show (CES) **Mar**
law **Feb**
reforms (1 July 2012) **Jul**
sharing schemes **Feb**
Contraception **Sep**
Cookers, freestanding **Dec/Jan**
Cooktops
gas **Aug**
induction **Mar**
Cordless phones **Feb, Oct**
Cots **Apr**
Country of origin **Sep**
Credit card travel insurance **Dec/Jan**
Customer service **Sep**
Cut flowers **May**

Dairy milk alternatives **May**
Dating sites, online **Feb**
Debt consolidation **Jun**
Dental tourism **Nov**
Detox products **Oct**
Diabetes **May**
Digital radios **Mar**
Dishwashers **Nov, Apr, Aug**
Dryers, clothes **Jun**
Dual fuel ranges **Nov**

Earphones
noise-cancelling **May**
standard **May**
Education, online **Aug**
Ebook readers **Feb, Aug**
Electric
blankets **Jun**
heaters **Jun**
Energy marketing **Oct**
Ethical investing **Nov**
Excess packaging **Nov**
Exercise experts **Jul**

Fans, ceiling **Sep**
Fast food, vegetarian **Jun**
Fees, ticketing **Jun**
Financial
advice reforms **Jul**
Flight booking websites **Feb**
Flowers, cut **May**
Food
baby **Dec/Jan**
beer **Sep**
breakfast cereals **Oct**
cake mixes **May**
cider **Feb**
coconut water **Aug**
fast food, vegetarian **Jun**
free-range eggs **Jul**
frozen seafood products **Mar**
milk (dairy) alternatives **May**
poppers (kids' juices) **Apr**
portion sizes **Sep**
protein powder **Sep**
salad dressings **Feb**
seafood, sustainable **Dec/Jan**
soy & rice milks **May**
Food processors **Oct**
Free-range eggs **Jul**
Freestanding cookers **Dec/Jan**
Fridges **Dec/Jan, Mar, Jul, Sep**
Frozen seafood products **Mar**

Gas heaters **Apr**
Garment steamers **Aug**
Google **Feb**
GPS **Nov, May**
in-car **Nov, May**
apps (smartphones) **Sep**

Headphones
noise-cancelling **May**
standard **May**
Health
antibacterials **Nov**
cancer **Apr**
chiropractors **Aug**
contraception **Sep**
dental tourism **Nov**
detox products **Oct**
diabetes **May**
diagnosis tools (online) **Jun**
exercise experts **Jul**
insurance **Jul**
insurance satisfaction **Apr**
multivitamins **Aug**
prosthetics **Mar**
sunglasses **Oct**
therapists **Feb**
vitamin D deficiency **Dec/Jan**
weight gain **Oct**
weight loss clinics **Mar**
Heating
electric heaters **Jun**
gas heaters **Apr**
Hedge trimmers **Sep**
Highchairs **Aug**
Home
builders **Mar**
mould **Aug**
removalists **May**
rent payment schemes **Jun**
theatre systems **Oct**
Home & contents insurance **May**
Home brands, supermarket **Nov**
Apr, May, Sep
Hose reels, self-winding **Dec/Jan**
Hotel clubs **Sep**

Insurance
car **Mar**
CHOICE Awards **Apr**
credit card (travel) **Dec/Jan**
health, extras & combined **Jul**
home & contents **May**
junk insurance **Aug**
satisfaction survey (health) **Apr**
Interest-free deals **Dec/Jan**
iPod docks **Apr**
Irons **Aug**

Landline phones **Feb, Oct**
Laundry detergents **Jun**
Lawnmowers **Nov**
Lay-by **Oct**
Lawn trimmers & edgers **Sep**
Light bulbs, CFLs **Nov**

Marketing, aroma **Aug**
Media players, portable **Dec/Jan**
Medical advice, online **Mar**
Microwave ovens **Feb**
Milk (dairy) alternatives **May**
Mixers & blenders **Jun**
Mobile phones **Dec/Jan, May**
Money
banking satisfaction **Dec/Jan**
children's bank accounts **May**
children's education funds **Jun**
ethical investing **Nov**
interest-free deals **Dec/Jan**
superannuation **Feb, Sep**
travel money cards **Apr**
Mould **Aug**
Multivitamins **Aug**
Next G **Feb**
phones **Jul**
usage **Mar**

New Year resolutions **Dec/Jan**

Online **Apr**
auctions **Nov, Mar**
booking flights **Feb**
dating sites **Feb**
education **Aug**
health diagnosis tools **Jun**
medical advice **Mar**
shopping **Oct**
Ovens **Mar**
benchtop **Mar**
cooker **Dec/Jan**
dual fuel range **Nov**
electric **Apr, Sep**
Parallel imports **Jun**
Penny auctions **Nov**
Phones
cordless landline **Feb, Oct**
mobile (smart) **Dec/Jan, May**
Playpens **Mar**
Poppers (kids' juices) **Apr**
Portion sizes (food) **Sep**
Portable cots **Sep**
Protein powder **Sep**
Pressure cleaners **Feb**
Printers **Jul**
Private car parks **Sep**
Prosthetics **Mar**

Radios, digital **Mar**
Refrigerators – see Fridges
Removalists **May**
Rent payment schemes **Jun**
Rice & soy milks **May**
Robot vacuum cleaners **Oct**

Safety gates & barriers **Dec/Jan**
Salad dressings **Feb**
Sandwich presses **Nov**
Seafood, sustainable **Dec/Jan**
Self-winding hose reels **Dec/Jan**
Set-top boxes **Nov**
Shaving schemes **Feb**
Shonkys, The **Nov**
Slings & carriers, baby **Jul**
Slippers, massaging **May**
Slow cookers **May**
Smartphone GPS apps **Sep**
Smartphones **Dec/Jan, May**
Soup makers **Jul**
Soy & rice milks **May**
Speakers, wireless **Jun**
Stick vacuum cleaners **Oct**
Stoves
cooker, 60cm **Dec/Jan**
dual fuel range, 90cm **Nov**
Steam stations **Aug**
Strollers **Apr, Jun, Sep**
Suitcases, on-board **Dec/Jan**
Sunglasses **Oct**
Sustainable seafood **Dec/Jan**
Superannuation **Feb, Oct**
Supermarket brands **Apr, May, Sep**

Tablet computers **Mar**
Telephones – see Phones
Televisions – see TVs
Therapists **Feb**
Ticketing fees **Jun**
Toothpaste **Jul**
Toy safety **Nov**
Travel
credit card insurance **Dec/Jan**
hotel clubs **Sep**
money cards **Apr**
online flight booking traps **Feb**
suitcases, on-board **Dec/Jan**
TVs
small **Oct**
medium **Dec/Jan, Aug***
large **Dec/Jan, Jul**
recording **Apr**
technology **Mar**
Tyres, car **Jun**

Vacuum cleaners
barrel/upright **Feb, Jun, Oct**
robot **Oct**
stick **Oct**
Vegetarian fast food **Jun**
Vitamin D deficiency **Dec/Jan**
Voice-recognition software **May**

Washing machines **Feb, May, Oct**
Weight loss clinics **Mar**
Weight gain, factors **Oct**
Wines **Nov, May**
Wireless speakers **Jun**
Women's financial products **Sep**
Work-from-home scams **Nov**
Wrap funds **Sep**

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HARD WORD

Thanks this month go to Rachael Knight, Janet Small, Anne Smith, Valda Ioane and Sue Oakfield. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

High flier

Could this innocuous-looking child's toy send you loopy?

3. 掀卡後紙雕蝴蝶旋即飛出
Open it then the magic flyer springs out all of a sudden

※ 警語：對於心臟病患與精神狀態不佳人士，請勿以此產品作為遊戲對象。
※ Warning : Please do not take the product playing with people who have a weak heart and seem to be out of their minds.

Any 2 for $18
6 Bottle Buy $90.00
SAVE$4 Single Bottle $15ea
Houghton White Classic, Penfolds Koonun
Hill Shiraz Cabernet or Jacob's Creek Chard
Pinot Noir NV

THE PRICE IS NOT RIGHT

There's something awry with the maths on Coles' bulk wine discounts.

Why have a barcode, when you can have a bark code?

$4.50

A BLINCH OF PADDING

Spotted in Priceline: we think Dad would have been pretty surprised to receive these on Father's Day.

TAKEN FOR A RIDE

This cycling tour company might want to reconsider its marketing slogan.

AllTrails are known for "Taking people for a ride"

ALLTRAILS

Take your pick of OUR LUXURY CYCLE TOURS

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